

*Henry Burton*

# *Practical Discourses*

On Several

## SUBJECTS.

By RICHARD FIDDES,  
Rector of *Halsham*, in *Holderness*,  
in the County of YORK.

VOL. I.

The Third Edition.



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By RICHARD FIDDES,  
Rector of Holford, in Holderness,  
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I.



Second Edition.



LONDON.

Printed by J. B. for J. B. at the Sign of the Ship, in St. Paul's Church-Yard; and at the Sign of the Anchor, in Fleet-Street; and at the Sign of the Ship, in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1774.

**Sir Arthur Kaye, Bart.**

**MEMBER of PARLIAMENT,**

**FOR THE**

**County of York.**

**SIR,**

**I** Had no sooner resolv'd to Publish this Volume of Practical Discourses, but I design'd my self the Honour of Your Patronage. It might be expected indeed, that what is intended to promote the Interests of Religion, and is in any Measure serviceable to that End, should need no other Recommendation. Yet, in an Age of so nice a Taste, and so free and formidable in its Censures, those who would Publish what

## D E D I C A T I O N.

*they Write, find it necessary to pass in-  
to the World under a Protection. Tho'  
there is another Design in most Dedications, which is not so commonly or ingenuously acknowledg'd. Amidst such a Number of Books, and Fugitive Papers, as are daily sent Abroad into the Nation, an obscure and undistinguish'd Author has no way of drawing the Eyes of the World upon his Writings but by hanging out, as it were, some shining and borrow'd Light before them.*

*These, Sir, are the usual Motives to Addresses in this Kind; and I shall be thought, no doubt, to have had my Share in them. However I may be affected on that Score, I had a much higher View in the Choice of my Patron. The End of making these Discourses Publick, being to Expose some of the Prevailing Errors and Vices of the Age, and to persuade Men to be solidly Good and Religious, I thought it might be very subservient to this End to prefix a good Name to them.*

*Naked*

## DEDICATION.

Naked Truth is too bright a Form  
for thoughtless and sensual Persons (who  
make up so great a Part of the World)  
to contemplate. We must therefore  
bring her down, as near as we can, to  
their Senses; we must present her to  
them in a visible Dress, in obvious and  
familiar Instances; we must show them,  
that she has her Votaries, and who they  
are. But I have good reason to believe

And 'tis a very particular Advantage  
to Religion, when Gentlemen, whose  
Fortune, or any Person's Merit sets  
them more conspicuously in the Eye of  
the World, are right in their Principles,  
and regular in their Practices. This is a  
Bright and Noble Character in itself;  
but where it shines with an hereditary  
Lustre, the Influence of it cannot but be  
still more Powerful.

These, Sir, are the Principal Rea-  
sons of my presuming upon this Free-  
dom to Your self. As to the Publick,  
'tis the most formal Thing in the World  
for Writers to amuse it with Apologies;



## DEDICATION.

For who obliges them to Write? If their Performances need no Apology, 'tis to no Purpose to make any; but if they do, all they can say will not procure them a favourable Reception. And certainly 'tis more eligible to be condemn'd without the most specious Excuses, than to be made sensible, after all, that they signify nothing.

But there are many good and Practical Discourses already Extant. 'Tis granted; and yet there will be always Occasion for more. Human Nature is an inexhaustible Source of Folly and Sin; which, tho' Rules in general may be prescrib'd against, yet Fools and Sinners are continually shifting the Scene, and starting up in one new Form or another, which renders it necessary to those, who would be instrumental in reforming the World, to vary their Attacks, with an Eye to the present and prevailing Disorders.

There was never, perhaps, a more Exact and Useful Way of Preaching, if  
a chaste

## DEDICATION

a chaste Stile, solid Reasoning, and wholesome Applications be a proper Method of Instruction; yet some vain or vicious Practice is, and, it may be fear'd, always will be, endeavouring to spread and establish it self, and ought therefore to be taken into more particular Examination.

So that those, who think there is no further Occasion for Discourses on Moral or Religious Subjects, seem to have consider'd Human Nature very little; the Knowledge whereof is yet so absolutely necessary to a Divine, that without it, let his other Qualifications be never so great, he will make but small Impression upon his Auditors.

And indeed nothing but what I here observe concerning the New Modifications, if I may so speak, which Vice daily receives, could have justify'd me in Treating of Two Subjects particularly, upon which we have already Two Discourses so perfect in their Kind; and those from Two of the greatest  
Ma-

## DEDICATION.

Masters in the Rational and Persuasive Way of Preaching, that this, or, I verily believe, any former Age has produced.

And yet, Sir, 'tis probable, the Irregularity of the Thoughts and the Tongue will always afford Preachers fresh and copious Matter to employ their own Thoughts, and Tongues, and Pens upon; we can never exhaust these Subjects so far, but Men will still be apt to think, and talk of what they should not.

SIR,

This is what I have to offer to Your Self, in Excuse of my Addressing these Discourses to You, and to the Publick, in Vindication of my Printing them; and the Trouble I give You, on the latter Account, may, I hope, be the more Pardonable from the Publick Character You bear; a Character! conferr'd on You with a Design of doing Service both to Church and State: The Interests whereof

## DEDICATION.

whereof are indeed so complicated and inseparable, that 'tis the most Chimerical Project in the World to think of dividing them.

'Tis, Sir, to Your good and known Affection to them both, that You owe so handsome an Appearance of Gentleness at the late Election for the County; and of the Clergy perhaps a more unanimous Appearance than Your Father Himself ever saw, or was ever seen in any Part of the Kingdom.

I am,

SIR,

Your most Humble,

most Obedient Servant,

28 SE 60

R. FIDDES

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# DEDICATION.

which are indeed so complicated and  
unfathomable, that in the most (I think)  
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THE  
CONTENTS.

THE Love of God to Mankind in the Incarna-  
tion of his Son : On John iii. 16. Page 1

THE Advantages of the Christian Dispensation : On  
1 Tim. i. 15. p. 28

THE Reasons why Jesus Christ appear'd in the World  
no sooner : On 1 Tim. i. 15. p. 46

SER-

## SERMON I.

THE Love of God to Mankind in the Incarna-  
tion of his Son : On John iii. 16. Page 1

## SERMON II.

The Advantages of the Christian Dispensation : On  
1 Tim. i. 15. p. 28

## SERMON III.

The Reasons why Jesus Christ appear'd in the World  
no sooner : On 1 Tim. i. 15. p. 46

SER-

T H E

# CONTENTS

## SERMON IV.

*The Nature of Evil Thoughts; with proper Directions for the Regulations of our Thoughts: On Prov. xxiv. 9.* p. 60

## SERMON V.

*The Reasons why the Scorners incur so general an Ostracism; and of the Distinction of Moral Good and Evil: On Prov. xxiv. 9.* p. 91

## SERMON VI.

*Of Evil Speaking, and the Proper Means to prevent it: On Psalm xxxix. 1.* p. 121

## SERMON VII.

*The Arguments on both Sides of the Question concerning the Validity of a Death-bed Repentance: On Acts xxvi. 20.* p. 152

## SERMON VIII.

*The Qualifications of Prayer, with respect to the Temper and Disposition of Mind wherewith we ought to Pray: On Ephes. vi. 18.* p. 174

## SERMON IX.

*The Qualifications of Prayer, with Respect to the Subject Matter of it: On 1 John v. 14.* p. 203

SER-

# CONTENTS

## SERMON X.

*The Nature and Measures of Christian Beneficence:*  
On Heb. iii. 16. P. 221

## SERMON XI.

*The Miracles are now neither necessary to the Conversion of Unbelievers, nor the Conversion of Sinners:*  
On 2 Pct. iii. 3, 4. P. 251

## SERMON XII.

*The Policy of worldly Wisdom in the Use of sinful and indirect Arts to accomplish its Ends:* On Matth. xvi. 26. P. 277

## SERMON XIII.

*The Practicableness of our Christian Duty, and the popular Objection against it, from the ill Lives and Manners of Christians, shewn to be of no Force:*  
On 1 Joh. iv. 3. P. 304

## SERMON XIV.

*Preach'd January the Thirty First, 1704. Being the Day on which the Anniversary of the Martyrdom of King Charles the First was then kept:* On Eccles. ix. 2. P. 333

SER-

# CONTENTS.

## SERMON XV.

*Preach'd to the Criminals in York Castle, July 4.  
1708. Principally on Occasion of the Murder of  
Major Thomas Foulks: On Prov. xviii. 14.*

P-359

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CONTENTS

SERMON XV.

Preached to the Criminals in York Castle, July 4.  
1708. Principally on Occasion of the Murder of  
Adam Thomas Follis: On Prov. xviii. 14.  
P. 329

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Mr.

# SERMON I.

The Love of GOD to Mankind in  
the Incarnation of his Son.

JOHN iii. 16.

*God so loved the World, that he gave his only  
begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in  
him, should not perish, but have Everlasting  
Life.*

**W**E have here very proper, and copious  
Matter - for our Meditations, at a  
Season, wherein we are Commemo-  
rating the Birth of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of  
the World. And indeed he himself seems more  
particularly to design, that when we employ our  
Thoughts upon these Words, we should take our  
Rise from the same Foot. For God, says he, in the  
following Verse, sent not his Son into the World to  
condemn the World; but that the World through him  
might be saved.

And therefore with respect to the Day, tho'  
whatever Jesus Christ did or suffered for us Men

and for our Salvation, may be consider'd, as an Effect of the Love of God to the World, yet I shall more especially apply my self to Discourse upon the Words, as they import God's giving this his only begotten Son to take our Nature upon him, and as at this time, to be Born of a pure Virgin.

*God so loved the World, that he gave, or sent, his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have Everlasting Life.*

If we observe the natural Order of the Words, there are these Five Particulars considerable in them.

- I. The Motive of God's sending his Son into the World, and that was Love. *God so loved.*
  - II. The Object of his Love; and that, as I shall shew, was every Person in the World, that should profess the Faith of Christ. *God so loved the World.*
  - III. The Dignity of the Person God sent into the World. *God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son.*
  - IV. The End, for which God sent his only begotten Son into the World, and that was, *that Men should not perish, but have Everlasting Life.*
  - V. And Lastly, the Means to attain this End; and that is Faith, under the Gospel-Notion of it, in Jesus Christ. *God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have Everlasting Life.*
- I. The

1. The First thing to be considered, is the Motive upon which God sent his Son into the World: And that was *Love*: A Love of disinterested, of undeserved, of pure Benevolence. For,

1. In the First place, what can we do, or imagine our selves capable of doing, that may render us necessary to the immense Being, who fills Heaven and Earth? We, who are Dust and Ashes, who border, in the nobler Part of us, so near upon Nothing, that should God but for the least moment with-hold the Hand that supports us in Being, we must immediately cease to be. How can a Man then be *profitable* to God? No, he is so infinitely happy in himself, and the Perfections of his own Nature, that he can receive no Accession to his Happiness from any thing without; much less, from any Service or Sacrifice that Sinners can offer him, tho' they could in the Language of the Prophet, *come before him, with thousands of Rams, or with ten thousand Rivers of Oyl*, Mic. vi. 7.

2. Neither was the Love of God in sending his only begotten Son into the World, founded upon any Consideration of our Merit; upon any Excellency or Perfection, that God saw in us, which might recommend us to his Favour, or render us worthy Objects of his Love. The Perfection of Man consists in the Light of his Understanding, and the Regulation of his Will and Affections by that Light: But in neither of these Respects could there be any thing to induce God to Love us; so far from it, that he is in the *first place*, represented as sending his Son into the World, as into a Land of Darkness; a Land wholly inhabited by Ignorance and Folly. The



Apostle speaking of the State of Mankind, and at a Time too, when Philosophy was in all its Glory, tells us, that *their foolish Hearts were darkned; that, professing themselves wise, they became fools; that they had Corrupted one of the first and most evident Principles of Natural Religion, the Unity and Spirituality of the Divine Nature; that, they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an Image made like to corruptible Man, and Birds, and four-footed Beasts, and creeping Things, Rom. i. 23.*

But the general Disorders Mankind were fall'n into; did not only lie in their Heads, but in their Hearts; their Morals were no less corrupt than their absurd Notions of Religion, and Religious Worship. They were filled with all Unrighteousness, Fornication, Wickedness, Covetousness, Maliciousness, Rom. i. 29. The Apostle adds a long Catalogue of the most horrid and heinous Crimes, which Human Nature, in its greatest Degeneracy, seems capable of committing; And in both these respects of the great Corruption in Principle and in Practice, which had overspread the Face of the Earth; Simeon blesses God, that he had sent his Son, the Day-spring from on high to visit the World, *to give light to them, that sat in darkness and the shadow of Death, and to guide their Feet into the way of Peace.*

The Jews, tho' God had chosen them to be a peculiar People to himself, and had not dealt so with any other Nation, yet were in many respects very Corrupt both in Doctrine and Manners, at the time of our Lord's Appearance among them. So that God could not be induc'd to send his Son into the World even in favour of them, because they were more righteous than other People; but purely because he loved them, and had a favour unto them.

'Twas

'Twas a Love in all Respects therefore worthy of that God, who is Good and does Good, whereby he was induc'd to restore his sinful Creatures to a Capacity of that Happiness, from which they were fall'n; a Capacity of rendering themselves infinitely and eternally Happy in the Enjoyment of himself; 'Twas a Love (but 'tis impossible to carry the Notion of it to a just Height) directly contrary to all the Maxims of Self-love, and all the Motives of Interest or pretended Merit among Men; 'Twas a Love to those, whose Hearts were turn'd from the Living God, the Author of it, to Idols; To those who had provok'd and affronted him daily; To Sinners who were at open War and Enmity against him; even *while we were Enemies*, God sent his only begotten Son into the World for our Sakes.

This was a Love in all Respects so wonderful, and surpassing, and worthy of God, that methinks I hear our blessed Lord delivering these Words, in a very high strain of Admiration himself: *God so loved the World!*

But this leads me to Consider,

II. In the next Place, the Object of God's Love; and that I am to shew is every particular Person in the World that shall profess the Christian Faith. 'Tis not necessary I should here enquire, whether the Love of God, in sending Jesus Christ into the World, had any further Views or Designs; or whether the Heathens, to whom the Gospel was never preached, shall have any Benefit by the Incarnation of Christ. Yet so far I shall adventure, with all Submission, to give my Thoughts of them, that the Merits

of our Saviour may, for any thing the Scripture declares to the contrary, extend to such of them, as have carefully endeavour'd to live up to the natural Light of their own Minds.

And this Opinion, I take it, is agreeable to the great Law of Christian Charity, and that particular Branch of it which is describ'd by *believing all Things*, and *hoping all things*; that is, all Things not contrary to the Nature or Reason of the Things themselves, and the revealed Will of God.

The Scriptures indeed expressly declare, that there is no other Name under Heaven given among Men, whereby they can be sav'd; and the Reason of this Declaration is evident, because none but Jesus Christ, who was Man that he might suffer, and God that he might satisfy, could offer up a valuable Attonement to his Father for the Sins of Mankind. But it does not necessarily follow from hence, that all Persons, to whom the Merits of Christ may in any way extend, must expressly believe in his Name, or have the Gospel preach'd unto them.

So with respect to Infants born of Christian Parents, and dying Unbaptiz'd, tho' the Scripture pronounces nothing expressly concerning their Salvation by Christ; and for that Reason the Church denies them Christian Burial; yet we have the Charity notwithstanding to hope, that they die in a salvable State.

But however God may deal with those, who never had the Means or Opportunities of believing in Christ, or who have not, through any Accident or Fault of their Parents, been baptized into his Name; we are assured that no Person who is baptized into it, shall finally perish,  
or

or fall short of Everlasting Life, but through his own Default.

For the Terms of Salvation are tender'd, and the Word of Reconciliation indifferently preach'd to all Men. And God has expressly declar'd, that he *willeth not the Death of a Sinner*; that he would *have all Men to be sav'd, and come to the Knowledge of the Truth*. Evasions we know are sought and found out by those, who assert the Doctrine of Absolute Decrees, in answer to these and the like Texts. But since those very Persons own, that in pursuance of so many express Declarations of God in Scripture, concerning his Willingness to save Sinners, every Man is oblig'd to believe, that he has an Interest in the Merits of Christ: How can they account for it, that the God of Truth should oblige Men to make wrong Judgments and believe a Lye? 'Tis impious to imagine, God can have such Intentions; and yet this is what all Christians are obliged upon the Calvinistical Scheme to believe.

How again will they answer it to the Sincerity of God, that he should, without Distinction, call, and invite, and exhort Sinners to Repentance; that he should in the most tender and affectionate Manner expostulate with them, *Why will ye die; why will ye not come unto me, that ye may have Life*? If at the same time he has by an Eternal Decree excluded the far greater Number of Christians, whom he thus addresses himself to, from all Possibility of entering into Life.

But above all, how will these Men reconcile it to the Justice of God, that he should punish Men for what they cannot help; or indeed to his Wisdom, that he should impose impossible Conditions upon them?



So that if either we believe God true in his Declarations, or sincere in his compassionate Addresses to Sinners; if we either believe him Wise in enacting his Laws, or Just in the Execution of them, we must for the same Reason conclude, that no Christian is excluded the Means of Salvation by Jesus Christ, who does not by his Apostacy or Impenitence exclude himself.

But I need go no further to confute a Principle so repugnant to all the moral Attributes and Perfections of the Divine Nature, than the Words of my Text, *God so loved the World*; for 'tis plain by the World is here meant Mankind in general: If the World be in this Place to be taken in a more restrain'd Sense, we are to understand by it any Distinction of Persons rather than the Elect; for in the Style of Scripture the World is commonly taken in the worse Sence, for Men of the World, who govern themselves wholly by the Maxims of it: But it no where signifies the Elect; on the other Hand it is us'd by our Saviour himself, *Chap. xv. 19.* in direct Opposition to the Elect.

So that when 'tis here said, that *God so loved the World*, the meaning is, that You and I, and every Person that is call'd to the Profession of the Christian Faith, has a Right, if he do not forfeit it by his own Neglect, to all the Privileges of the Gospel, which through the Merits of our Saviour, are indifferently made over to all Christians. *Whosoever*, as it follows in the latter Part of the Verse, *believeth in him, shall not perish but have everlasting Life.*

But let us proceed to Consider,

III. Thirdly,

III. Thirdly, the Dignity of the Person God sent upon this great Design. *God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son.* The Divinity of Christ is so clearly established in Scripture, and in so many Places, that nothing can tend to overthrow this Fundamental Article of our Faith, but what renders all the Proofs we bring for the other Articles of it, very uncertain and precarious: For there is no other way of eluding the Texts, whereby we prove that Christ is a truly Divine Person, but by saying, that they ought to be explain'd in a Sense directly contrary to the most obvious and natural Signification of the Words, and all the ordinary Rules, whereby we interpret the Words or Writings of other Men: But if such a Liberty (and such is the Liberty which the *Arians* and *Socinians* can find their only Refuge in) may be allowed; then, I say, 'tis plain the Scriptures may be made to prove any thing, and so by a necessary Consequence, would prove nothing.

'Tis a strange thing that Men should desire to distinguish themselves by reviving old Heresies, and that too, without being able to produce any new Proofs for them: For after all the high and mighty Pretensions in Favour of *Arianism*, the main Stress of the Cause is still laid on Two Texts of Scripture, wherein the old *Arians* placed in a manner their whole Strength and Confidence. And yet those Texts make nothing for them, as I hope it may not be improper for me, in as few Words as possible, to shew. While I am asserting the Divinity of the Person, God sent into the World; what can be more reasonable than to endeavour a Vindication of his Honour and Divinity?

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The first Argument I shall take notice of, which the *Arians* alledge to prove that Jesus Christ was not truly God, is from his own Words; *John xiv. 28. My Father is greater than I.* These Words have been so often explained in a Sense no ways injurious to the Divinity of Christ, and in so very easy and natural a Manner, that 'tis really Matter of Wonder any Person should at this Day object them to the Orthodox. To say that God with respect to his Paternity is greater than the Son, is so far from having any Difficulty in it, that according to the natural Order of Things, and our human Ways of Conception, we cannot think or speak otherways; and if we will conceive of Things, we must conceive after the manner of Men. Thus he that is sent, is, by a natural and indeed necessary Construction, so far inferior to him that sends: He that goes unto another, as our Saviour in the Words immediately preceeding represents himself going to the Father, is, in that respect, ordinarily suppos'd, to ascribe some Superiority to the Person he approaches: So a Son, though he may perhaps be esteemed on the Account of other Qualifications greater than his Father, yet with respect to the Filial Obligations and Obedience he owes to him, he is certainly less.

Had our Blessed Saviour said, that *God is greater than I*; this, it must be own'd, would have afforded the *Arians* some more specious Pretence at least to deny or oppugn the Divinity of Christ: For with respect to the Godhead or Divine Essence, *none is afore or after other, none is greater or less than another.* But when our Saviour says only, *my Father is greater than I*: When he resolves the Superiority of his Father into the relative, natural

tural and immutable Order whereby we conceive of Things; when he says nothing but what was most proper for him to say, supposing him really God; with what Shew, with what Pretence of Reason, can his Words be made use of to prove that he was not God?

The Explication which the Orthodox give of these Words, *My Father is greater than I*; is very obvious and natural: But can the *Arians* give, or pretend to give any such easy Solution of those Words of the Apostle? *Phil. ii. 6.* that Jesus Christ *thought it no Robbery to be equal with God.* We very clearly apprehend, why the Father, with respect to the relative Order of the Deity, should be greater than the Son. This Priority of Order is agreeable to our common Notions of Things; but in what respect can it be said, that a Creature is equal with God; or what clear Notion can we have of any such Equality? Let us carry our Thoughts of the Creative Power as high as possible, yet 'tis impossible for us to find any Medium to bring the Being that Creates, and the Being that is Created, as all one together; the Distance one of them bears to the other is still Infinite, there can be no Equality between them, nor any thing like it.

This is the way of all Hereticks, when the most obvious and literal Sense of a Text makes against them, then a Metaphorical or other Figurative Sense is to be put upon it: But when any Text appears, upon the first View, to make for them, then we are obliged to adhere strictly to the Letter of it; which indeed, as to those Words, *My Father is greater than I*, there is no Necessity of departing from. The Sense wherein we explain them, is so obvious and agreeable to the

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the manner, wherein Christ would have expressed himself, supposing he really had been God; and for that Reason, as I intimated before, the Words cannot be made use of to prove, that he is not God.

The other Text from Scripture ordinarily alledg'd, against the Divinity of Christ, is from the 13th Chapter of *Mark*, and the 32d Verse, where our Lord confesses himself Ignorant of the Day of Judgment. In answer to this, it is reply'd, that he was so, with respect to his Human Nature, wherein he is said to have increas'd in Wisdom and Stature, like other Men. Which by the way could not possibly be, if the Divine *Logos* supply'd, as we are told, the place of the rational Soul. Or it may be reply'd, that Christ in his Capacity of a Prophet, had no particular Instructions to make known the precise time of the Day of Judgment to the World.

There is no extraordinary Force contrary to the common Forms of speaking among Men, put upon the Words by this Interpretation; and nothing can be more Natural than the former. But what puts an End to the Dispute at once, there is an absolute Necessity, and must be so in the Judgment of the *Arians* themselves, for Interpreting the Words in one of these Senses.

This will readily be granted, if it can be made appear, that Christ did really know the precise time of the Day of Judgment; and there is all the reason in the World to believe that he did.

For at the very time he is giving an Account of the last Judgment, he describes several very extraordinary Circumstances of it. He tells us of strange Revolutions among those Heavenly Bodies,

Bodies, by whose Motions all Time is measur'd. Now, 'tis impossible to conceive, but that, if our Saviour knew the Order of Natural Causes, he must have known at what time, any great Change or Disorder might happen to them. As a Man who thoroughly understands the Motions of his Watch and how long it will go, may easily calculate the time of its being down.

But if our Saviour did not perfectly know the Order of Natural Causes, how could it be said, that, in him are *hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge*, Col. ii. 3. or that, he knoweth all things, John xxi. 17. or that, he made the Worlds, and *upholdeth all things by the Word of his Power*, Heb. i. 2, 3. If the Two former Texts did not suppose Christ, which they evidently do, to be Omniscient; yet how can we suppose that the things which were made by him, and for him, which he continually supports in Being, and the Order they are in, should receive any remarkable Change, without his knowing the Time when it will happen; especially since he is the Cause of that very Change himself, Heb. i. 12?

The Summ of what I have said is this, That if our Saviour represented himself as Ignorant of the Day of Judgment, and yet really in the Hypostatick Union did know it, there is no way of reconciling this seeming Inconsistency, (for it can be no more), but either by saying, that considered meerly as Man, he did not *know* it, or as a Prophet, it was not in his Commission to *make* it known.

So that, I hope, it appears there can be no reason from either of the Texts I have been con-

considering, to hinder us from understanding these Words in the Orthodox and Catholick Sense, *God so loved the World that he gave his only begotten Son.*

What Argument could our blessed Saviour have us'd to give Men a greater Idea of the Love of God towards them? And no doubt, there was a particular Force and Energy in the Words, as they came from his own Mouth. *He was that only begotten Son, the Second Person of the ever glorious and adorable Trinity, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten of the Substance of his Father before the World, and Man of the Substance of his Mother, born, as at this Time, in the World.* So far our Creeds, agreeably to the Sense of the Holy Scriptures, have declar'd his Generation.

But who can declare his Generation, in a manner worthy of him, and of the Glory which he had with the Father from the Beginning! How unable are we, when we consider him in his Divine Nature, to raise our Thoughts to any becoming Pitch! How unequal would our Expressions be to the infinite Perfections of it, tho' we could speak with the Tongue of Men and Angels!

Let us therefore turn our Eyes from the dazzling Brightness of his Glory, that we may consider him a while in his State of Humiliation; only before he laid himself so low, let us raise our Thoughts and our Affections along with them, to contemplate this great and glorious Person bowing the Heavens, as it were, to come down, and take our Nature upon him.

Then let us reflect, how by the ineffable Operation of the Holy Spirit he was conceiv'd in  
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the Womb of a poor Virgin, distinguished by nothing so much as Her great Piety and Innocence. The Blessed Mother, for so all Generations shall call her, goes with this Illustrious Child 'till the usual Time of Delivery; but when the Days were accomplish'd that the Saviour of the World was to be born into it, what Preparations do you think were made for his Birth? It might have been expected indeed, that both Heaven and Earth should have assisted at it: But good God! how very mean and poor are all Things about him; every Thing seems wanting on so wonderful and extraordinary an Occasion! This Heavenly Babe has not those Accommodations, which the most wretched and indigent of his Creatures are ordinarily provided with in such Cases; there is no Room for him in a common Inn; he is born in a Stable, and laid in a Manger. Thus the Birth of Christ is described in Scripture; the Expressions indeed are plain, but such, as those who endeavour to heighten by any Colours of Rhetorick, always fall below the Significancy of.

So far only the Season leads me to consider the State of Christ's Humiliation; and certainly no Christian after this should think himself capable of doing any thing, that may deserve the Name of a Condescension. Never sure was such an Affront put upon the gay Trifles and Vanities, wherein the Sons of Men are apt to pride themselves, as by the Circumstances wherein the Son of God made his first Appearance in the World. Let us learn, from the Consideration of them, if not to look upon all worldly Grandeur and Glory with a generous Contempt and Indifference, yet at least to think of our  
selves,



selves, under any superior Circumstances of Life, *Soberly, and as we ought to think.*

IV. Let us consider the great End of God's sending his Son into the World; and that was, that Men might not Perish, but have everlasting Life. It had been a Design very worthy of the Goodness of God, to have rescued Sinners from the natural and miserable Consequences of their Sins in another World; but to translate immortal Souls from a State of Misery, to that of eternal Life and Happiness; to restore wretched Sinners to a Capacity of a more perfect and glorious State, than that wherein Man was at first created, in a Terrestrial Paradise! To publish, not so much a general Act of Indemnity to his rebellious Creatures, as of the last and highest Favour, which a just and good God seem'd capable of conferring! This, I say, is what we can never sufficiently praise or admire his Goodness for; and therefore 'tis upon this finishing Design of his Love, in rendering Men capable of everlasting Life, that I shall more immediately at present turn, and employ my Thoughts. But here again I am at a Loss to describe that ever blessed and glorious State, which we are to understand by *everlasting Life*: We have indeed now and then a transient View of it, as it were, opened to us in the Holy Scriptures; but at the same time we are informed, that the Happiness of it is such, as we are not able fully to comprehend, or even in this mortal State, *to see and live.* St. Paul, before he had a nearer Prospect of the Glory which shall be revealed hereafter, was caught up into the Third Heaven; and there indeed, but whether in the Body, or out of the Body, he could not tell, a

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wonderful and ravishing Scene of Delight was presented before him: Yet when he came down again, all he could express of the great Things he had heard and seen, was, that they were *inexpressible*; such as it was *not lawful*, or rather, as the Marginal Note of our Bible has it, *Not possible for a Man to utter*, 2 Cor. xij. 4.

But blessed be God, tho' our present Conceptions are so unequal to the Glories of that State which God has prepared for them that love him, and wherein everlasting Life consists; yet we are not altogether ignorant of it; we see it, as through a Glass darkly; we know it in Part.

We know in general, that when we go hence and are admitted into the Regions of Light and Life, we shall have a more near and distinct View of all the glorious Attributes and Perfections of the Divine Nature. We shall see God as he is; and in that blessed Vision, our Minds will be continually enlightned and enlarged with the brightest Discoveries of Truth; and all Things we desire to know, will upon Sight, as it were, be presented to our Minds, without the Labour of Attention, or the Trouble of what we here so often mis-call Discourse and Ratiocination. In this Light, O blessed and glorious God, shall we then see Light, and drink till we are satisfied at the everlasting Fountain of thy Truth! If the Pains we take in the Pursuit of an uncertain, and, if I may so call it, fugitive Knowledge in this Life, are not without an agreeable Pleasure, and which sometimes upon the least Dawn of a new Light, penetrates us in a very sensible manner; how shall we be transported, when the Rays of Truth spread themselves o'er our Minds, not by slow and successive Motion,

but all at once! When we shall be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the length and breadth, and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, and be filled with all the Fullness of God, Ephes. iij. 18, 19. For our Knowledge will not, like that of the great Clerks and Philosophers of this World, then consist in idle and fruitless Speculations; but the more we know, the more we shall love: In Proportion as our Minds are enlightened, our Hearts will be inflamed. And what is now commanded us as a Duty, will clearly appear to be our greatest Happiness; and would do so even in this Life, did we place, as we ought, our Happiness in it; that is, in loving God with all our Hearts, and all our Minds, and all our Strength.

We shall then see the blessed Jesus, whose humble and mean Appearance in the World we have been contemplating, exalted on the Right Hand of the Majesty on high, and re-instated in the Glory he had with the Father from all Eternity. We shall see him infinitely beyond the Brightness of the Sun, shining in all the Lustre of a glorify'd Body, and we shall have even these frail, these mortal, and corruptible Bodies fashioned like unto it; then shall we behold Myriads of Angels prostrate at the Feet of him who had not where on Earth to lay his Head; we shall hear them continually praising him, according to his excellent Greatness, and saying, Blessing, Honour, and Glory, and Power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever, Rev. v. 12, 13.

It will be a further Accession to this Happiness, if any thing after the Vision and Enjoyment of God, and our glorify'd Saviour, can be thought

thought an Accession to it, that we shall have the Conversation of the best and wisest, the most lovely and loving of Beings; that we shall be blessed with an entire Confidence, and free Communication of our Thoughts; that no Jealousy or Suspensions, no private or Party Regards will be able to dissolve or shake our Friendship; but we shall love one another, as if there were no such thing as Self-Love, as if it were for ever banished those happy and peaceful Regions.

Thus while we are casting our Views forward upon that blessed State, which we all of us hope one Day to go up to and possess, we insensibly fall into Negative Descriptions of it. But the Inspired Penmen themselves, in Condescension to our Weakness, have described it after the same manner. So St. John tells us, *That the blessed Inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, the City of God, shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the Sun light on them, nor any Heat, Rev. vii. 16.* And again Chap. xxi. 4. *God shall wipe away all Tears from their Eyes, and there shall be no more Death, neither Sorrow, nor Crying, neither shall there be any more Pain, for the former things are done away.*

So far I have endeavoured to speak something, tho' God knows after a very imperfect manner, of what we are to understand by that everlasting Life, which God sent his only begotten Son into the World, to put every one of us into a Capacity of attaining.

Fifthly, I proceed in the Last Place to consider the Means of attaining it, and that is Faith, under the Gospel Notion of it, in Jesus Christ. *Whosoever believeth in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting Life.*



By Faith, under the Gospel Notion of it, I mean such a Faith as is lively and operative; a Faith that worketh by Love, and discovers it self by good Works; a Faith that effectually excites Men to repent, and to bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance. There is a Notion indeed too common in the World, that a firm Belief, or, if you please to express it so, Recumbence on the Merits of Christ, justifies Sinners, without any manner of Regard to the other Condition of the New Covenant, Repentance from dead Works. But to this I have Two or Three Exceptions to make.

1. That this Notion of Justifying Faith is without any good Foundation in the Holy Scriptures, but very much tends to overthrow all the Reasons and Arguments in Scripture to a Holy Life, and cannot be reconciled with those Texts which make Repentance, or a New Obedience, of absolute necessity to Salvation.

2. One great Reason, why good Works are excluded the Notion of Justification, is, that we may not arrogate any thing to our selves in the Business of it. To suppose we are capable of contributing any thing our selves towards our being Justified, opens a Way, we are told, to Spiritual Pride, and the Dangerous Doctrine of Merit. But for the same Reason, Faith ought to be excluded the Notion of Justification too; for Faith, as it is an Act of the Mind, is properly a Work, as much as Meditation, Charity, or Humility, or any other Act of the Mind whatever.

3. Properly and strictly speaking, neither Faith nor Works justify; that is, neither of them is a meritorious Cause of our Justification: 'Tis  
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God that *Justifies*, in Consideration of the Merits of Christ. Faith is a Means indeed, upon which God has entitl'd us to an Interest in the Merits of Christ; but may we not say the same of Repentance and good Works? Is it not as plain as Words can express, that to *repent* and turn to God, and do works meet for Repentance, is made the indispensable Condition of the Pardon of our Sins, and the Salvation of our Souls; and that not by one occasional Passage or two in the Holy Scriptures, but agreeably to the main Drift and Design of them? This is too Evident to be deny'd, or to need any Proof: Yet if any Person will still say, that Faith is the Primary, or more immediate Condition of our being Justified, I shall not contend about Words, so long as we keep to the main Point; and I am not oblig'd to think any Man in a State of Justification, but he that can shew me his Faith by his Works.

4. Those Passages of St. *Paul*, wherein he is thought to speak very slightly of Works, and which have been the great, tho' groundless Occasion of this Error, concerning Justification by Faith alone without Works, or any Obligation to them; those Passages, I say, are to be understood of the Works of the Law, that is, the *Mosaical* Rites and Ceremonies. Thus particularly with respect to Circumcision, some of the converted *Jews* held it so obligatory, that they were of Opinion, except Men were Circumcis'd after the Law of *Moses*, they could not be sav'd. In opposition to this, the Apostle shews, that Faith in Christ, that Faith which he is the Object of, as Christ, as a Prophet to instruct, and a King to govern, as well as a Priest to atone for them,

and which must therefore necessarily include Obedience, and Repentance from dead Works; this Faith, I say, the Apostle shews, is alone sufficient to the Justification of Christians, without the Observance of those Legal Ordinances, which God, by *Moses*, commanded the *Jews*.

That this was the Sense of the Apostle, appears from the Controversy which was manag'd for some Time with no little Heat between the *Jewish* and *Gentile* Converts, concerning the Expiration of the Law of *Moses*; but he no where opposes Justification by Faith alone to the Moral Law, or to Repentance, and a holy Life; as if he had foreseen on the other Hand, what ill use some Persons might make of his Way of Arguing, either through Weakness or Design: He puts the Question, in Vindication of his Doctrine, with a more than ordinary Concern, *Do we then make void the Law through Faith? God forbid: Yea, we establish the Law.*

So that there appears to be no such Difficulty, as some have imagin'd, in reconciling the seeming Inconsistency between the Two Apostles, *St. Paul* and *St. James*, on this Subject: *St. Paul* asserts, That the *Jews*, converted to Christianity, were no longer oblig'd to submit to those Burthens, which neither themselves, nor their Fathers were able to bear; but that Faith alone in Christ, as it imports Obedience to the Laws of the Gospel, which is therefore called the *Law of Faith*, is sufficient to Justification without the Legal Rights and Observances of the *Mosaic* Law. *St. James* asserts, That all Christians are justified by Works, and not by Faith only; that is, by the Moral and Evangelical Duties required of us by Christ, and flowing from a lively and

and operative Faith in him. That this is the true and scriptural Notion of Justifying Faith, I might produce innumerable Passages out of Holy Writ to shew: But I shall conclude this Point with one of them, and that alone one would think should for ever put a Period to this Controversy: They are the Words of the Apostle St. John, *He that doth Righteousness, is (righteous), δικαιοσύνην, is Just, or shall be reputed so before God, 1 John iij. 7.*

Thus I have endeavour'd, as briefly as I could, to shew, that the Faith whereby we can hope to be justify'd, and attain that everlasting Salvation which God sent his Son into the World to capacitate us for, must always include an Evangelical Obedience.

I shall conclude with a Practical Inference or two, from a Consideration of the great Love of God to Mankind, in sending his only begotten Son into the World.

1. Then, this Consideration of the Love of God to us, is proper to teach us an entire Resignation to his Will, under all Events of Life whatever. From hence we are assur'd, that the severest Trials and Difficulties wherewith God is pleas'd at present to exercise those that love him, are the Effects of his Good Will and Loving Kindness towards them; the Corrections of a Father, inflicted in Tenderness to his Children, that they may learn Obedience, and grow wiser and better. *God who so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting Life,* will not send his faithful Servants any Afflictions or Sufferings of this present Life, but in order to the same End; and therefore when he



makes use of any such Methods of Severity, we are to consider them as his *strange Work*; as the Effects of a particular Will, against a general Inclination.

Let us therefore, under any afflicting Circumstances of Life, (if it may be proper to mention any such at a Time of universal Joy and Gladness) comfort our selves with these or the like Reflections: *That* He who gave his only begotten Son to take our Nature, as at this Time, upon him; will also with him freely give us all Things; that is, all Things which are fit for him to give, or which we are in a proper Disposition to receive. After so amazing an Instance of the Divine Love and Goodness towards us, we cannot imagine God Almighty capable of designing any Evil against us, however we may be tempted to complain of what he lays upon us. We are assur'd on the other hand, from the great Things he has done for us already, that our Interests lie in his Hands; that he has a Favour unto us; that he loves us; and that therefore he does not afflict willingly, or grieve the Children of Men, but in order to accomplish some wise and good End of his Providence or Grace.

2. Let the Consideration of God's great Love towards us, be a Motive to inflame our Affections, and bring us still nearer and nearer towards him. Setting aside all other Engagements to this Duty, 'tis but reasonable that we should return him Love for Love. The several Attributes and Perfections of his Nature are indeed proper Objects of our Admiration, and naturally excite in us a Desire of enjoying him: We cannot but have very strong Inclinations to unite our selves to

to the most powerful, the most knowing, and wisest of Beings: But still were it not for the Goodness of God, and that Love whereby he describes his Nature to us, (1 John iv. 19.) as if it were in some peculiar manner essential to it; these Attributes of Power, and Knowledge, and Wisdom, would only serve to render him more formidable to us; and so, instead of desiring to unite our selves more and more to him, we should endeavour to fly as far as possibly we could from him, where his Hand could not reach, nor his Eye discover us.

'Tis this Attribute of his Loving Kindness, that renders all the Attributes of God still more lovely and desirable; and therefore if we are not altogether insensible, it cannot but be an invincible Motive and Engagement upon us to love him. So the Apostle represents it, when he describes our Love to God, flowing from a Consideration of his Love to us, as a necessary Effect from its Cause. *We love him, because he first loved us*, 1 John iv. 19.

3. Let the same Consideration teach us to love one another. The Motives to this Duty are innumerable; but when I am enforcing it from a Consideration of the Divine *Philanthropy*, I am more particularly confin'd to consider it under these Two Notions: First, As 'tis a Duty highly excellent in it self; and, Secondly, As 'tis well-pleasing to God.

1. The Excellency of it appears in this, That 'tis agreeable to one of the Moral Perfections of the Divine Nature; there is something Great and Noble, and *God-like* in it; and therefore Generosity, or a Disposition to do good, is properly termed Greatness of Mind: And indeed  
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none are so truly great, or in a more proper Sense, Partakers of the Divine Nature, than they whose Goodness and Love, for I here use them indifferently, is most extensive. Of all the communicable Attributes of God, his Love is that wherein we seem capable of the nearest Approach to him. So that if we have any Ingenuity or generous Inclinations, any Desire to be Followers of God, and to imitate him in the most imitable and lovely Perfection of his Nature, let us walk in Love. Let us consider the Force of that other Argument the Apostle uses, 1. *John* iv. 11. *If God so loved us, how ought we also to love one another?* But hence it appears also in the next Place,

2. That this is a Duty highly pleasing to God, as well as excellent in its own Nature; accordingly he has expressly declar'd, That the good we do to others is grateful and agreeable to him; *with such Sacrifices*, saith the Apostle, *God is well pleased*, (*Heb. xiiij. 16.*) And the Reason why they are so well pleasing to him, is, Because they render us most like him, in that Perfection of his Nature, which he more peculiarly in the Holy Scriptures delights to honour, and distinguish himself by. As Parents are never better pleas'd, than when their Children resemble them in some particular Beauty or Excellency they value themselves upon. 'Tis a familiar Comparison, but 'tis none of my own; the Apostle makes use of it as an Argument, why, in Imitation of the Love of God to us, we should love one another. *Be ye therefore*, says he, *Followers of God as dear Children, and walk in Love*, i. e. as *Children* that desire to endear your selves to your heavenly Father, by endeavouring to resemble him in his beloved Attribute. Let

Let us therefore, as we desire to please God, and live in his Favour, embrace all Opportunities of doing good to all Men, especially at a Time, wherein we are celebrating in a more solemn Manner the great Love of God for us: Let us think it incumbent on us to extend our Charity in a larger measure to *the Poor*, that they may not go without their Part in the common Joy and Festivity of the Season. But in Truth, those of us that are preparing for the Reception of the Holy Sacrament, have another very powerful Motive from the *Season*, to engage us to this Duty of Charity and Beneficence to the Poor; as we are going to celebrate a Divine Institution, which was not only design'd as a perpetual Memorial of the Death of Christ, and the Benefits we receive thereby, but as a Feast of mutual Joy, and whereby we express our Love and Good Will towards one another.



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## S E R M O N II.

### The Advantages of the Christian Dispensation.

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I TIM. i. 15.

*This is a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners.*

**T**HE Apostle, in the former Part of the Chapter, advises *Timothy* not to amuse himself with trifling or fruitless Speculations, but to endeavour after a solid and unaffected Piety. To this end, instead of the endless and intricate Disputes of those, who pretended to find a Mystery in every thing, he recommends to *him* the saving Knowledge of Jesus Christ, and lays it down as a Truth of the greatest Importance, which Christians ought not only to employ their Thoughts upon, but to have continually at Heart; that this Divine Person, in the *fulness* of Time, came down from Heaven, and was incarnate for us Men, and for our Salvation. *This is a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners.*

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In discoursing upon which Words, I cannot propose to my self a more useful Method, than in proceeding upon the Two following Enquiries.

I. What were the Advantages of Christ's Coming into the World, in order to the Salvation of Sinners: And,

II. If his Coming into the World was necessary to this End; why he appear'd in it no sooner.

I. I am to enquire what were the Advantages of Christ's Coming into the World, in order to the Salvation of Sinners.

Now the Answer to this in general is very obvious; the Coming of Christ into the World was so far beneficial, and conducive to the Salvation of Sinners, as it tended to deliver them from their Errors, and their Sins; *To turn them from Darkness to Light, and from the Power of Satan unto God.*

But to give us a more clear and distinct Notion of the Advantages of our Lord's Incarnation, to these Ends, it may not be improper to consider him in his several Capacities of a Prophet, a Priest, and a King; and to shew how, in all these respects, he is the Author of our Salvation; and because 'tis impossible for me, at this time, to enlarge in a particular View of these Offices, I shall only touch upon some of the most considerable Branches of them.

I. Then; as a Prophet, Jesus Christ made a full and perfect Revelation of God's Will to Mankind. I shall consider the Advantages of this Revelation, in order to save us from our Sins, in these two respects; as it is a perfect Rule

Rule of our Duty; and as it acquaints us with the Terms, upon which God has declar'd, he will be reconcil'd to Sinners.

i. As the Christian Revelation is a perfect Rule of our Duty; those who do not live up to the Laws of the Gospel, nay, even those who deny it to be divinely revealed, cannot but acknowledge the Purity and Perfection of its Morals; it sets before us the Law of Nature in a clear and convincing Light, dispels the Darkness wherein it lay in a great measure hid among the Gentiles; and exposes the corrupt Traditions, whereby the Jews had in many respects obscur'd it, and in some render'd it of none effect.

As to the deprav'd Notions of Morality among the Heathen, among their Learned Men and Philosophers, and at a Time too, when Learning and Philosophy were in their greatest Glory, (see Rom. i.) they are the less to be wonder'd at, when we consider the Theology of those Days, and what sort of Gods Men made to themselves; for the most clear, the most distinct, the most convincing Proofs we have of Moral Truth, are taken from our Ideas of the Divine Attributes.

Now the Notions Men had of the Deities, they then paid their Devoirs to, being so corrupt, 'tis no wonder their Principles, in relation to Morality, were so too; Incest and Adultery, Riot and Excess, Rapes and Revenge, being the Achievements wherein the Gods distinguish'd themselves, and placed their greatest Glory: 'Tis not strange, that the People, in Imitation of them, confounded the Distinction of Virtue and Vice, and called Evil Good, and Good Evil.

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This being the State of *Theology* among the Heathen, they fell into the most abominable Disorders, even upon *Principle*; and their very Worship was celebrated by perpetrating the most impious and infamous Crimes; and indeed, what could appear more reasonable, than that Men should imitate the Gods they adored; and that the Rites of worshipping such Gods, should be agreeable to their Attributes?

Yet it must be granted, several of the Heathen Moralists saw, and perhaps secretly lamented these absurd and popular Errors; we owe them this further Acknowledgement, that there lie scattered up and down in their Writings, many Excellent Sayings for the Conduct of Human Life. But then there were two Things which rendered their Instructions less useful, and less effectual to the Conviction of others: Either they wanted Authority to confirm the Truths they taught, or Courage to teach the Truths they knew, with the Openness and Freedom they ought to have done.

The Want of Authority to confirm their Doctrine hindered it from spreading so wide, and having those good Effects, which might have been otherwise expected from it. Let us suppose for Instance, that *Plato* had been qualified to give the Age, he liv'd in, a perfect Draught of the Moral Law, in a Treatise compos'd for this Purpose; every Rule of Life he had laid down, ought, upon this Supposition, to have been made out by clear and convincing Proofs. It not appearing that he was infallible, he had no more Right than other People to require an implicit Assent to what he taught upon his bare Assertion; but every Man had a Right, especially



ly in Cases of Difficulty, to put the same Question to him, which the *Egyptian* did to *Moses*; *Who made thee a Prince and a Judge over us?*

This Philosopher ought therefore, in order to establish his Doctrine in the World, to have made good every thing he said by Dint of Argument, and by a Train of Proofs, which might render the Conclusion clear and evident beyond Contradiction: By this means his System would have swelled to such a Bulk, that few Persons would have had Leisure or Inclination to go thorough with it, or Patience to give it a strict Examination.

Another Reason which hindered the Progress of Morality among the Heathens, was, that their Philosophers had not the Spirit, which is necessary to those who would instruct and reform the World. They were unwilling to bring any Danger or Disgrace upon themselves; and 'twas not safe for them to go against the Stream of popular and prevailing Errors. *Socrates*, indeed, gave a Noble Instance of his Courage, and which cost him his Life, in Defence of the great Fundamental Article of Religion, the Unity of the Godhead. Before and after him the Wise Men were cautious how they render'd themselves obnoxious to the State, or risqu'd their Lives and Fortunes for the sake of their Principles. 'Tis plain, the Divine Philosopher we have mention'd, and *Cicero*, the Two Great Lights of the *Gentile* World, were, with all their *fine* Thoughts and Eloquence, afraid in some Cases to speak out. The Men of Letters in general, whatever their private Sentiments were, easily comply'd with the Religion establish'd by the Laws, and to recommend themselves to Fa-  
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vour, or secure their Interests, made no Scruple of conforming, occasionally at least, to a Worship, which they condemn'd, in their own Hearts, as false and Idolatrous. But the greatest Wonder is, that Christians should, at this time of Day, put themselves upon proving Conformity to such Rites of Worship, as themselves judge sinful, to be no Sin.

I am to shew, that both these Defects I have mention'd in relation to the Morality of the Heathen, are fully and abundantly supply'd by the Coming of Jesus Christ into the World. A Prophet, who brings his Credentials as Jesus Christ did from Heaven along with him, need give no other Reason for what he says. That God has revealed any thing, is worth all the Arguments and Demonstrations in the World. The Revelation of God is the Reason of God, that effectually and at first View commands our Assent, and supercedes all *Human* Reason concerning the Truth of it.

I need not enlarge upon this Head, to convince you of the Expediency, of the Necessity of Divine Revelation, in order to instruct Mankind in their Duty. 'Tis a Blessing, we can never be too thankful to God for, (how much soever the *Deists* condemn and abuse it) that we are not left to the uncertain Conjectures of Natural Reason, in Answer to that great and important Question, *What shall we do to be saved?* But have a sure Word of Prophecy to direct us what we are to do; and *to which therefore*, as the Apostle exhorts, *We ought to take heed, as unto a Light shining in a dark Place.* For tho' 'tis true, the great Lines of our Duty are written in very legible Characters on the Tables of our Heart, yet all

the particular Branches of it do not discover themselves with the same Evidence and Conviction. This has occasion'd the different Sentiments of Men in all Ages concerning certain Points of Morality; and at this Day not only particular Christians, but whole Nations professing Christianity, apprehend no Danger or Guilt in acting contrary to the Principles, as there is no great Difficulty in proving them, of Natural Religion. 'Twill be hard to persuade a People, that subsists by Trade, that there is any Crime in *Avarice*, or in the Arts of fraudulent and unjust Gain. 'Twill be to as little Purpose to tell others, that 'tis a Sin to Carouse to Excess: And others again, that 'tis not lawful for a Man, upon any private Motive of Revenge or other Passion, and against the Authority of Publick Laws, to shed Human Blood: If now, that we have a Divine Law, which clearly condemns these Practices, Men will not attend to it, or follow the Light of it, certainly the Arguments from mere Natural Religion would have much less Force and Evidence to persuade them.

All these Considerations tend to shew us, how necessary it was that a Prophet should come from God, who should teach, *as one having Authority*, and give us a System of Laws, establish'd upon a pure and infallible Foundation. All that the *Deist* can pretend against the Expediency of Divine Revelation, so far as it relates to Morality, is that the Truths of it are no more than we own to be agreeable to Reason: But does it therefore follow, that every Man could have discovered, or made them clearly out by Reason? 'Tis one thing to assent to the Reasonableness of a Truth revealed to us; and another thing

thing to reason rightly and justly concerning it, without the Benefit of such a Revelation.

While Unbelievers argue against the Authority of Divine Revelation, they endeavour to extinguish that very Light by which themselves see. To what can it be imputed, that a more pure and refin'd Morality discovers it self, where ever Christianity is profess'd and taught, but to the Advantages of the Christian Religion? What other Reason can be given, why the Heathen Moralists, as soon as the Gospel was publish'd in the World, were observed to have more just Sentiments, in relation to the Duties of Natural Religion? But further:

As our Saviour, in his Character of a Prophet, was perfectly qualify'd to reveal the Will of God to Mankind, so he had no private Views or Regards that might hinder him from discharging his Office, as became a Teacher sent from God. *To this End was he born; and for this Cause came he into the World, that he might bear witness unto the Truth,* 1. John xviii. 37. and he kept entirely throughout the whole Course of his Ministry to his Commission. He was not aw'd by a servile Complaisance, or Fear of giving Offence to the Pharisaical Faction, which then prevail'd and carry'd all before it, from asserting the Truth boldly, and retrieving it from the smooth and softning Glosses which those Men of Latitude had put upon it. For there is no End, in the Cause of Truth, of yeilding; whatever Changes happen in the World, she is uniform and always the same, and will not admit of the Degrees of more or less. If we once quit our Hold of her, and come within the Verge of Error, like a Whirlpool, 'twill wind



us in more and more, till by Degrees we have no Strength left for recovering our selves. Men, who out of any ill Prospect, make a wrong Concession, or admit a false Principle, do not know to what Excesses, they may run in the same Kind, for the same Reason.

The Notion of moderating the Precepts of Christianity, and bringing them down to the deprav'd Taste of the Age, has been the great Scandal of it, almost since the Time Princes became Christian. Never did our Holy Religion appear in so much Glory, as in its greatest Simplicity, before the Wisdom of this World, and the Arts of pleasing and prophesying smooth Things, had mingled themselves with it. Then it was that Parties and Cabals, Jealousies and Suspicions, Envy and Slander, and every evil Work distracted the Church, and at last broke out into scandalous and avow'd Schisms; and then a Necessity of bearing with those Disorders, which tended to subvert all Peace and Piety in the Church, was pretended from Political Considerations, and Reasons of State.

These are the visible Effects of Mens confounding Divinity with Politicks, and the Maxims of making their Court. But the Great Prophet that was to come into the World took another way, he did not go about to soften Matters, or to bend his Doctrine to the prevailing Humours or Interests of the Time; he made no Distinctions in favour of great and notorious Sinners on account of their distinguish'd Parts or Quality; but he taught the Truth, tho' with admirable Temper and Candour, yet without Artifice or Disguise, as indeed every Man, especially, who teaches it in the Name of God, ought to do. But,

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2. The Advantages of the Christian Revelation appear further, as it acquaints us with the Terms upon which God has declared, he will be reconcil'd to Sinners. Had our Saviour only prescrib'd us the Rules of Holy Living, but given us no Assurance, that after all, God would upon our Repentance pardon the many Defects of our Obedience, Natural Reason could never have remov'd or sufficiently clear'd all our Doubts concerning his Acceptance of it. For tho' Men might conclude from the Goodness and Mercy of God, and the Methods of his Providence in governing the World, that he does not always deal with the Sinner after his Sins, nor punish him so soon as he deserves Punishment: And *that* therefore he may be induc'd, when we are truly penitent for them, to pardon our Sins. Yet pardoning Mercy being an Act of Grace, and not of Debt, which God may or may not dispense as he thinks fit, it cannot be certainly concluded that he will pardon, till he has positively reveal'd his Will to this end.

The furthest, Natural Reason can go in this Case is to put the Question with the *Ninevites*, *Jonah iii. 9. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce Anger, that we perish not?* But then the very same Reason upon which a Sinner argues that God may pardon his Sins, will conclude that he may not; for what may be, may not be.

A good Prince may pardon a Traitor, or a good Man a false Friend; but it does not necessarily follow, that either of them will do it: Nay, there may be very wise Reasons why neither of them should do it. But supposing a Prince should for the *first* Crime pardon a Re-

bel, or a Man the Infidelity of his Friend; does it follow that they are oblig'd to do it upon every fresh and repeated Provocation? Now this is the Case of the Sinner; 'tis not once he has offend- ed God, but he has many Sins, and those per- haps committed with many aggravating Circum- stances to answer for. Could we then suppose that the Mercy of God might incline him to pardon the Sinner his First, or Second, or the Third Offence: Yet where does Natural Reason tell us, that God will always be provok'd; that where his Mercy has been long, *long* despised or abus'd, his Justice will not at last interpose?

If we argue, that the Goodness of God will dispose him to pardon the Sinner, because a for- giving Mind is the Character of a good Man or a good Prince; we must carry the Argument no further than the Foundation, upon which it stands, will bear; that is, tho' we may suppose God willing to bear with our Sins for a Time, yet we cannot suppose from any Humane Consi- derations of Justice, that he will bear with them always, or that if a Sinner *do Evil a thousand times*, and his Days be *prolong'd* in his Wicked- ness, yet he shall still live and die in the Favour of God.

So that all the Light Natural Religion can afford a Sinner, as to the Acceptance of his Re- pentance with God, must still leave him in great Doubt and Perplexity; not to say, De- spondency of Mind. For indeed, in a Questio- n of such infinite Concernment to us, as, Whether after all, God may possibly pardon our Sins, and save our Souls? one would think we should be capable of no Ease or Repose in our Minds, 'till we had removed all possibility of Doubt concerning it, What

## S E R M O N II.

What thanks then do we owe to God for the Benefit of a standing Revelation to ascertain us of this great Truth, that upon our sincere Repentance through the Merits of Christ, he will be merciful to us, and remember our Sins and Iniquities no more. How sweet and comfortable are those Words of the Prophet *Isaiah*! *Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have Mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon, Isaiah lv. 7.* Where does Natural Reason give us any such express Assurance, that God will be reconciled to Sinners, and not impute their Trespases to them? What little Satisfaction is there in putting Questions, and saying it may be so, or *who can tell?* When if it should happen to be otherways, the Sinner is lost, irrecoverably lost and undone to all Eternity.

2. But, *Secondly*, Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners, as he came to offer himself a Sacrifice to God for their Sins. Whatever God, by right of his absolute Authority, might have done in order to the Pardon and Remission of Sin, yet he would not remit it without some valuable Acknowledgement and Reparation to his offended Majesty. The Notion we have of Justice, is, that it may punish those who deserve Punishment; but it does not necessarily follow, that he who has the Right of Punishing, will therefore make Use of it. Indeed how far this Right is to be asserted, seems rather a Consideration of Wisdom than Justice. 'Tis thought no Diminution, to the Character of a just Prince, to indemnify State Criminals by publick Acts of Grace and Pardon: Nay Clemency is, and has



ever been reputed one of the Glories of a Prince, where there are good Reasons for it, and such as are agreeable to the Ends of Government.

So that if we may argue from the clearest Ideas we have of Human Justice, there seem'd no absolute Necessity, why God, in order to the Pardon of Sin, should have sent Jesus Christ into the World to suffer in the Person of a Sinner. But whatever God, with the Safety of his Justice, might have done, we are assur'd, that the Sufferings of Christ were agreeable both to his Justice and Wisdom: To his Justice, because he had a Right to punish; and to his Wisdom, because there were a great many Reasons why he should punish. For hereby he declared his Hatred and Abhorrence of Sin in the most sensible and awakening Manner; he gave the greatest Evidence of his Love to Mankind; but demonstrated withal, at the same Time, that tho' his Mercy may pardon, yet where the Honour and Authority of his Laws require, his Justice will certainly and severely punish.

But my Business, at this time, is not particularly to enquire why God would not admit Sinners to Pardon but through the Merits of Christ, who *once in the End of the World appear'd to put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself!* I am only to observe, that in Fact, this was the Method which the Wisdom of God made Use of to restore us to his Favour; and that Christ, by thus expiating for our Sins, perform'd the true and proper Office of a Priest.

But this Sacerdotal Office, to which indeed the Salvation of Sinners is more immediately ascrib'd in Scripture, not merely as an instrumental,

tal, but a meritorious Cause: This Office of our Blessed Lord, I say, did not only consist in his making an Atonement for the Sins of Mankind, but having appeas'd his Father's Wrath, upon the Cross, he ascended into Heaven, there as our High Priest, continually to appear in the Presence of God for us; there he interceeds in our behalf to his Father, with the Price of his Blood in his Hands, and all his Intercessions are heard. This gives us Confidence in our Prayers to God both for his pardoning and sanctifying Graces. The Apostle speaks of this Confidence in Terms which import the highest and strongest Degrees of Assurance: He calls it, *An Anchor of the Soul, both sure and stedfast*; and the Reason hereof is assign'd in the following Words, *because it entereth into that within the Vail, whither the Forerunner is for us entred, even Jesus made an High Priest for ever, after the Order of Melchisedec, Heb. vi. 19, 20.*

The Author of this Epistle insists particularly upon another Reason to shew us the great Advantages, in order to the Pardon of our Sins and the Salvation of our Souls, from Christ's still continuing to exercise his Sacerdotal Office in Heaven for us; and that is, from his having a tender, compassionate and experimental Sense of the Infirmities of Human Nature. So the Apostle argues, *It becometh him in all things to be made like unto his Brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make Reconciliation for Sins; for in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted, Heb. ii. 17.*

3. But, *Thirdly*, as the Benefits of Christ's Death were not design'd to extend to all Persons without

without Distinction, but only to such as should live in Obedience to his Laws; 'twas further necessary, in order to the Salvation of Sinners, that he should be instated in his Regal Office, and have all that Power in Heaven and Earth committed to him, which might enable him to destroy the Power of Sin, and the Kingdom of Satan.

To this end, Christ no sooner suffer'd and rose from the Dead, and in Consequence of his Death and Resurrection, ascended up on high, and enter'd into his Glory, but he gave Gifts unto Men; such Gifts as were necessary to promote the great Design of his Coming into the World, to build up a Spiritual Temple to God, whereof the Magnificent Temple of Solomon was but a faint Type, and *to purify to himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works.*

These Gifts were at first conferr'd as the State of the Church in its Infancy requir'd; in a more extraordinary Manner, and accompany'd for some time with extraordinary Effects; and some of them with such Effects as were truly miraculous. But the Truth of the Christian Religion being once confirm'd by Miracles, the Reason, and consequently the use of them ceas'd. Yet the saving and sanctifying Graces of God's Holy Spirit were to continue to all succeeding Ages; because there could be no time wherein they would not be necessary to the Conversion of Sinners, and the Edifying the Body of Christ, the Church; which he had purchased with his own Blood.

This therefore is one of the special and standing Acts of Authority, wherewith Christ is now invested at the Right Hand of God, as Head of the

the Church; that according to the different and spiritual Exigencies of his Servants, he sends them the inward Supplies of his Holy Spirit to enlighten and direct, to comfort and assist them, and to train them up by just Degrees, and in due Time for his Kingdom, that *where he is, there they may be also.*

And indeed, were it not for this Act of his Royal Authority, all that our Blessed Saviour has done and suffer'd for us besides, would have been ineffectual to our Salvation; To what purpose had he as a Prophet laid before us a perfect Rule of our Duty, and acquainted us upon what Terms God would be reconcil'd to Sinners? Or to what End had he as a Priest become our Sacrifice, in order to reconcile us to God upon those Terms, if he had done nothing further to enable us to perform them? For in the very Nature and reason of Things, Guilt and Punishment are inseparable; so that could we suppose a Sinner, while he continues so, capable of the pardoning Grace of God, with respect to external Punishment, yet with respect to the inward State and Disorder of his Mind, he would still be miserable by a *natural* Causality, and incapable of that Happiness, which consists in the Vision and Enjoyment of God. 'Twas necessary therefore that Christ, in order to render his Death effectual towards freeing us from the Punishment of our Sins, should free us from the Power and Dominion of them by his Grace.

For alas! How weak and unable are we to think or do any thing truly pleasing to God of our selves! How unequal is the Combat, when we are left to our selves, between Reason and Inclination.



Inclination, especially when it proceeds from prevailing Temper, or is violently mov'd! How soon are we baffled and defeated, when we fight against Pleasure! In a word, to those who do not walk by the Spirit; How generally does Nature prove too strong for a fine Thought, or even the firmest Resolution! Did not the Scriptures assure us of the Necessity of a Supernatural Grace, in order to repair the Defects and Disorders of Human Nature, we need only put the Question to our own Hearts to be convinc'd of it.

But now, that we are, as, blessed be God, *we* assur'd, that in all our Endeavours to discharge our Duty faithfully, and in all our Conflicts with Temptations, we have an inward and divine Principle to animate and strengthen us; What Difficulties shall we not be able to surmount? What should discourage or overcome those who have the Power of God's Grace, to oppose to the Strength of Concupiscence, and the inward Delights of it to the Pleasures of Sin?

This powerful and preventing Grace is the Gift of Jesus Christ, which he has a Right to dispence to the several Members of his Church, being now exalted, as a Reward of his perfect Obedience and meritorious Sufferings, at the right Hand of God, to be a Prince and a Saviour, and *able to save to the utmost those that come unto God by him.*

I might further add, that Christ, as the supreme King and Sovereign of the World, will one Day come with all the Ensigns of Power and Royalty, with thousands and thousands of Angels attending him, actually to confer that  
Salva-

Salvation on his faithful Servants, which he is now by the Light of his glorious Gospel, and the Methods of his Grace preparing us for. But I can only mention this Act of his Royal and Judicial Authority.

Thus I have endeavour'd to shew, in pursuance of my first Enquiry, how, with respect to his Three Mediatorial Offices, *Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners.* And I hope, from what has been said, you are all dispos'd to conclude with me, or rather indeed with the great Doctor of the *Gentiles*, that this is a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation. And indeed, what Saying is there like it in the Philosophy of the *Gentile* World? How insipid are all the gay Flowers of all the Philosophers put together, to this one Truth!

Let the Deist talk of his State of Nature, and the Means which Human Reason prescribes in order to reconcile Sinners to God; let him, if he can, satisfy himself as to all the Doubts and Difficulties, and to say the best of them mere Conjectures, wherewith his Principles are entangled; for my own Part I desire, and so, one would think, should every Man else who believes he has a Soul to be sav'd, to acquiesce in this faithful Saying, and accept it with all Thankfulness to God, that *Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners.*

# SERMON III.

The Reasons why Jesus Christ appear'd in the World no sooner.

1 TIM. i. 15.

*This is a faithful Saying and worthy of all Acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners.*

I Proceed to my second Enquiry, that if the coming of Jesus Christ into the World was so necessary to the Salvation of Sinners, Why did he appear in it no sooner?

In Answer to this Popular Question,

I. I shall lay down some probable Reasons why our Saviour appear'd in the World at the Time he did. And,

II. One Reason in particular, why he could, not, consistently with his Design of coming into the World, have appear'd at any other Time. And,

1. 'Tis probable our Saviour appear'd at the Time he did, because one great Proof of his Mission, and the Truth of his Religion was to

be taken from the Accomplishment of the Prophecies concerning him. Now the greater Distance of Time there was from the Prediction to the Event, the stronger, the more unexceptionable were the Proofs drawn from it. Wise Men may have a great Insight into Events which lie not far from them, or have some visible Connection with the Causes which ordinarily produce them: But to foresee Facts many Ages distant of a contingent Nature; Facts which exceed the settled and ordinary Powers of Nature; such as were the wondrous Works which Jesus Christ did, and his Resurrection from the Dead: This, I say, is the peculiar Prerogative of God, who by his Knowledge has a perfect View of the whole Chain of Causes at once; and by his Power can make things which *are not*, or which do not appear to have any natural Efficiency to produce such Effects, *to bring to nought*, or to co-operate to *things that are*.

But there was this further Reason why the Prophecies concerning Christ were given out so long before their Accomplishment; that a Succession of Prophets at different Times, and of different Characters, as to their Genius and Way of Writing, and who, for this Reason, could not be suspected of combining together to deceive the World, should severally speak of the Things pertaining to the Kingdom of Christ. By this means also the Expectations of the People of *Israel* concerning the *Messiah*, were continually awaken'd and kept up, and rais'd by gradual Steps, as the Time of his Appearance drew near, still higher and higher: For these Reasons it seem'd agreeable to the Wisdom of God, before his Son appear'd in the World, to speak of him  
unto



unto the Fathers by the Prophets; at *sundry Times*,  
and in *divers Manners*.

2. At the Time of our Saviour's Appearance in the World, Philosophy and the Sciences were more generally cultivated, and Learning more common than perhaps in any other Age of the World: By this means the Proofs of the Christian Religion were more strictly examin'd, and better establish'd. Had our Saviour been born in some dark and obscure Part of the World; had he wrought his Miracles as *Mahomet* and the *Romish* Saints are pretended to have done in a Corner, it might have been said, and not without some Shew of Reason, that the Facts upon which the Truth of Christianity is founded, were liable to great Suspicion of Imposture and Deceit; and that the Author of this Religion, being a Person of a superior Genius and Capacity, might take Advantage of the Ignorance and Simplicity of the People where he convers'd, to draw them after him, and engage them blindly in his Designs.

But now, that Jesus Christ appear'd at a Time, when a general Report and Expectation of the Coming of some wonderful Person had drawn the Eyes of the World upon him; of a *World*, to which the Manner of his Appearance, and the Nature of his Doctrine were so contrary to all the Maxims of; a *World*, which wanted no Advantage of Human Learning or Wisdom to detect, or of Wit and Eloquence to expose an Impostor: That Christ, I say, should plant his Religion at such a Conjunction in the World, and that too against the settled Laws and Powers of it, can *only* be ascrib'd to the native Force and Evidence of its Truth.

3. Our Saviour appear'd at a Time, when there was the greatest Probability of propagating the Doctrine he taught, as well as of giving so considerable a Confirmation to the Truth of it. The Extent of the *Roman Empire* at that Time, gave the Apostles and others, who labour'd in the Word and Doctrine, a more free and open Access to the several Parts of it: So that they divided, as it were, a great part of the known World amongst them, and had their several Provinces allotted them; by which means a great Number of Converts were daily added to the Church, and that Prophecy concerning Christ receiv'd a remarkable Accomplishment, that he should have the *Heathen for his Inheritance, and the utmost Parts of the Earth for his Possession.*

4. I shall mention but one probable Reason more of our Lord's Appearance at the Time wherein he chose to appear; which tho' it might peculiarly relate to the State of the *Jews*, yet may not be altogether unworthy our Observation. 'Tis this; That Jesus Christ was to descend from the Royal House and Lineage of *David*. But 'tis evident from the Prophecies concerning the State of his Humiliation, that he was not to exercise any Temporal Power or Authority upon Earth; and therefore those Prophecies which speak of his Government and Kingdom in such magnificent Terms, are either to be explain'd in a figurative Sense; or understood of the Glory wherewith he is now invested at the Right Hand of God, and wherein he will come to judge the World.

Now, as our Saviour disclaim'd all Secular Dominion, he chose to appear in the World at a

time wherein his Pretensions to it could be the least suspected; at a time when the Royal Family he drew his Descent from, was at the lowest Ebb, and probably lay undistinguish'd in the common Level. 'Twas for the same Reason, that during his Triennial Ministry, he kept himself, in speaking of his Kingdom, within remote and parabolical Expressions: And when in private Conversation with his Disciples, he gave more open Intimations of his being the *Messiah*, the King of the *Jews*, he charg'd them not to tell it abroad. 'Tis true, in the last and concluding Scene of his Life, he publicly declar'd himself before *Pilate* to be the King of the *Jews*; but he was then under such Circumstances, that the State had nothing to fear or apprehend from this Declaration.

Yet to prevent any Misconstruction of his Words which might render him obnoxious to the Powers then in being, he declares at the same time to *Pilate*, *That his Kingdom was not of this World*. Upon this, *Pilate* was inclin'd to let him go, as a King and no King; a chimerical Pretender to such a Sovereign Power as he had never heard of before. He concluded right enough, that his Master at *Rome* would not give himself any Trouble about a Prince, whose Dominions lay in another World.

To observe this, to shew how cautious the Blessed Jesus was, both with respect to the Time and Circumstances of his Birth, and the Conduct of his whole Life, to give no Umbrage to the State under which he liv'd: Tho' if Tyranny and Oppression would have vacated the Commission of those who were then at the Head of it, there wanted not a Pretence; But that indeed there

never will upon this Principle, for the Arms of Resistance. But,

2. Let all that has been said concerning the probable Reasons of Christ's appearing at the time he did in the World, go for nothing: Let us suppose that 'twas not necessary or requisite that the Prophecies concerning his coming should have been deliver'd so many Ages before; or, if you please, that the time of his Appearance had not been determin'd by any Prophecy at all: Let it be granted further, that his appearing at a time when the Proofs of his Religion might be best establish'd, and the Doctrines of it propagated, and himself have a proper Opportunity of exemplifying a very important and distinguishing Duty of it: Let it be granted, I say, that there is no Weight in any of these Considerations, or in all of them put together, yet I have still one Reason in reserve to shew, why our Blessed Saviour could not have appear'd in the World at any other time, consistently with his Design of coming into it.

My Reason is this: That before God would admit Sinners to any Terms of Pardon or Reconciliation, he had, decreed that Christ should make an Atonement for Sin by the Sacrifice of himself. To this End he was to be betray'd into the Hands of wicked Men, who should put him to Death; and the Death of the Cross having something peculiar and cruel in it, to denote the Curse he was to be made for us; and being at that time in use among the *Jews*, 'twas agreeable to a wise End of his Suffering for us, that he should be Crucified.

Now, out of mere Respect to Human Nature, we cannot believe that there was ever any Age



or Nation in the World produc'd such Monsters of Ingratitude and Impiety, as could have been induced to conspire against the Life of the most Innocent, the most Holy, the most Divine Person that ever liv'd; and afterwards to put him to a most cruel and cursed Death. This Scene was to be acted by the *Jews* only, and by them too, at a time when there was so general a Corruption among them; and the Measure of their Iniquities seem'd to be fill'd up.

I confess there is no Force in this Argument, to those who maintain, at least by necessary Consequence, that God does not only foresee the sinful Actions of Men, but determines them to such Actions; as if Sinners could not be instrumental in accomplishing the Events he foretels, except we suppose him the Author of Sin. God indeed, upon this Supposition, if it be not impious even to make it, might in any Age or Nation of the World have over-ru'd or determin'd the Wills of sinful Men to *crucify the Lord of Glory*: But if we believe, as I hope we all do that our Sins are the Effects of our own Freedom and Choice, and not of any secret Determination, or positive will of God; then I conceive, there is great Reason to conclude, that probably the Son of God could not have appear'd at any other time, so agreeably to his Design of becoming a Sacrifice for our Sins.

But are we not told, *Acts iv. 27, 28.* That the People of Israel were gathered together, to do whatsoever God's Hand, and his Counsel determined before to be done? And do not these Words seem to import, that God not only decrees the Event, but by an over-ruling Impulse determines the Will of Men to such Actions as are proper to produce

duce it? I answer, this is no just Consequence; there is a wide Difference between God's determining, that such a thing shall be done, upon his fore-seeing, that Men left to their free Choice will do it, and his overcoming the Freedom of their Choice to compel them to do it. God decreed that Christ should be betray'd, and die for our Sins, by the Hands of wicked Men. But this Decree, for the Vindication of God's Holiness, must be suppos'd in Consequence of his fore-knowing that wicked Men would thus betray Christ, and put him to Death, if left, and so far he determin'd to leave them to the free Execution of their wicked Designs.

So wicked indeed! that no Language can furnish us with proper Forms of Speech to express the Horror of them. And therefore, 'tis with peculiar Marks of Reproach, the Apostle addresses himself to the *Jews*, as guilty of a Crime, which the most profligate Wretches upon Earth could not have been suppos'd capable of committing, against so good and excellent a Person; and, whose Life it was the constant Business and Employment of to do good, tho' he was frequently at the Expence of a Miracle to do it. Thus St. Peter puts the Matter home to their Consciences; *Ye Men of Israel hear these Words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man Approved of God among you by Miracles, Wonders and Signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye your selves also know: Him being delivered by the determinate Counsel and Fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked Hands crucified and slain, Acts ii. 22, 23.*

From what has been said, I hope it sufficiently appears, that there are not only very probable

Reasons, why our Saviour came no sooner into the World; but one Reason in particular, why he could not come, in pursuance of one great Design of his Coming, either sooner or later.

3. Give me leave now, before I conclude, to draw some useful Inferences from the foregoing Discourse. And,

1. If Jesus Christ came into the World to save Sinners, let us take Care that we do not frustrate the great End and Design of his Coming, by living in a sinful or impenitent State. He has indeed proclaim'd a general Act of Grace to all those who are in a State of Enmity against God. But he had Power to set what Bounds and Limitations he thought fit to the Benefits of that Act; and before we can plead it, he strictly requires that we should submit and surrender our selves, and give all possible Assurances of our future Fidelity and good Behaviour. Christ will not be a Priest to apply the Benefits of his Atonement to those, who do not own him for their Prophet and their King; to those who desire not the Knowledge of his Ways, or say in their Hearts, *we will not have this Man rule over us*. He has satisfied, indeed, fully satisfied his Father's Justice for the Breach of the Covenant of Works; but for Unbelievers and impenitent Sinners, and for those who will not come in upon the Terms of Salvation tendered to them in his Gospel, the *Covenant of Grace*, there was no Satisfaction made. If they will still despise and abuse so great a Mercy, nothing remains for them but a *certain fearful looking for of Judgment*; and they must bear their own Iniquity for ever and

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Nay,

Nay, if we, who know these Things, are not influenc'd thereby, to live in all holy and sincere Obedience to the Commands of God; it had been better and more tolerable for us, if Christ had never died, or come into the World at all. The Scriptures so frequently assure us of this, that 'tis a most amazing Thing to consider how any Christian should be capable of the least Ease or Repose in his own Mind, while he continues in a sinful Course of Life; and after all Christ has done to save him, goes on, as it were, with his Eyes open, in those Paths which lead to a sure, but withal a greater Damnation.

This therefore is what we ought to do, if we would not disappoint the gracious Design of Christ's coming into the World to save Sinners. We must sincerely endeavour to know, and to do the Will of God; or if through Inadvertency or Surprize; but above all, if through Presumption and wilful Design, we at any time fall into Sin, our next Care must be to renew our selves again unto a hearty and speedy Repentance. We must so expect to be sav'd by Christ Jesus from our Sins, as to use the Means he has prescrib'd of freeing our selves from the Power of them, and *working out our own Salvation.*

2. If Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners, then certainly 'tis of the greatest Importance and Concernment to us to take Care of our Salvation. Were it a Matter of no Consequence, as Men seem frequently by their way and manner of Life to think, whether they be sav'd or damn'd; God would never have sent his Son into the World to take our Nature upon



him, to be born, and live all the time of his Sojourn here in such low and hard Circumstances, to be at such Pains in Teaching and Preaching the Truths of our Holy Religion; and at last after innumerable Indignities and Affronts put upon him, to be nail'd to a Cross, and put to Death, between two Thieves and notorious Malefactors; and all this to the End, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting Life.

We cannot suppose it consistent with the Wisdom of God, that he should employ all these Methods and Miracles of his Love to save Sinners, if it did not much concern them, whether they took Care to be sav'd. For would the All-wise God use so many strong and persuasive Arguments to persuade Men to a needless Thing? Ought we not rather to conclude on the other Hand, that the Care of our Souls is the one Thing needful? Because it is so in the Judgment of him, who best knows the Worth of them, and the Consequences of saving or losing them for ever.

3. If Christ came into the World to save Sinners, let us take Care how we limit the Ends of his Coming; he has offer'd the Terms of Salvation to all Christians indifferently; Why should we restrain them to a *select* Few, exclusive of the far greater Number of those, who are baptiz'd into, and profess the Christian Faith? Can that be called a faithful Saying and worthy of all Acceptation, or, as 'tis rendred in our Communion-Service, worthy of *all Men* to be receiv'd, which the generality of Men are altogether incapable of receiving? Would this be a proper Paraphrase on the Words of the Apostle, or  
agree.

agreeable to his Design in them, of giving us a great Idea of the Love and Goodness of our Lord to Mankind? " I am going, *Timothy*, to " lay down an important Truth, which above " all others it concerns you, and every Christi- " an in the World besides, to have at Heart, and " to rejoice with all Thankfulness to God for, in " *that* Sinners are now, through the Merits of " Christ, admitted to a Capacity of having " their Sins pardon'd, and their Souls sav'd. " But I must not dissemble it to you, at the " same time, that very few Persons in compa- " rison are intended to have Interest in the Me- " rits of Christ; and if they have not, tho' they " are call'd upon indeed to hear the Word of " God, and to live in the Use of his Ordinan- " ces, yet 'tis not to be expected that what they " do in this kind, or in other commanded In- " stances of Obedience, should have any sa- " ving Effects upon them. This, I take it, is no strain'd Interpretation of these Words of the Apostle, upon the Principle of particular Electi- on or Redemption; but certainly 'tis very far from the Intention of the Apostle thus to ex- clude the much greater Number of those, for whom Christ died, from the Benefits of his Death.

Let us then, in pursuance of the general De- clarations of God in the Holy Scriptures, enter- tain more large and worthy Thoughts of the Design upon which Christ came into the World. Let us conclude, that no particular Christian in the World shall finally perish, but for his own Default; much less, that he shall be in worse Circumstances, as he has great Reason to fear upon the Principle I have mention'd, for being  
a Chri-

a Christian. *For God sent not his Son into the World to condemn the World; but that the World through him might be saved, Joh. iii. 17.*

Fourthly and Lastly; Now that our Saviour is come into the World, let us bless God that our Lot is fall'n in that Part of it, where his Holy Religion is profess'd and taught in the greatest Purity; we have now seen the Accomplishment of those Prophecies concerning Christ, which the Fathers wish'd to see, but did not see. Let us walk worthy of so great a Mercy, and hear the Words of Eternal Life from his own Mouth; let us take Care to regulate our Lives by the Laws of that Glorious Gospel, which is the Power of God unto Salvation; and let us be the more careful herein, lest this be our Condemnation, that Light is come into the World. Whatever might be the Reasons, and some of them I have endeavour'd to lay before you, upon which the coming of Christ into the World was deferr'd so long; blessed be God, he came at last: Now once, in the End of the World, hath he appear'd to put away Sin. God grant that the Effects of his Appearance may be more visible, than alas they generally are, in our Conduct and exemplary Piety. Indeed, when we consider the corrupt State of Christians, instead of enquiring, Why Christ came so late into the World? It might, perhaps, seem a more proper Question, Why he came so soon? But the Answer to this is very easy: That the Intention of our Lord, in his Coming, was to save Sinners; but if they will not be sav'd by him, their Impieties are not to be ascrib'd to the natural Tendency or Design, but to an accidental Event of his Coming. Tho', indeed, the

# SERMON III.

59

the best Way of answering this Question, and the most for the Honour of our Holy Religion, is by living up to the Laws of it, and practising those Duties, which are made the indispensible Conditions upon which alone Sinners can hope to be sav'd. Which therefore, that we may all do, God of his infinite Mercy grant. Amen.

The Nature of Evil Thoughts  
proper Directions for the  
tious of our Thoughts.

## SERMON



the best way of answering this Question and  
the most for the Honour of our Holy Religion  
is by living up to the Laws of it, and practising  
those Duties which are made the Indispensable

## S E R M O N I V.

The Nature of Evil Thoughts; with  
proper Directions for the Regula-  
tions of our Thoughts.

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P R O V. xxiv. 9.

*The Thoughts of Foolishness is Sin: And the  
Scorner is an Abomination to Men.*

**T**H E R E are few Persons so wicked, but  
they endeavour at least to put on an Air of  
Virtue and Innocence, and to keep their Sins as  
private as they can. If there be any ( as God  
knows some there are ) who are Libertines by  
*Profession*; who make a mock at Sin, and glory  
in their Shame; who sit in the Seat of the *Scorn-  
ful*, and desire to distinguish themselves by a  
prophane Conversation, and a vicious course  
of Life; we must consider them, as Exceptions  
to the common Ingenuity and Reason of Man-  
kind. And therefore, however they may value  
themselves upon some slight or bold Turns of  
Wit, yet Folly and Ignorance are all along their  
Character in Holy Scripture. Thus the Author  
of my Text particularly addresses himself to  
them

them in the Name of Wisdom, *Prov. i. 22. How long, ye simple ones, will ye love Simplicity? And the Scorners delight in Scorning, and Fools hate Knowledge?* So that in the Judgment of him, who had the greatest Reputation in the World for Wisdom, a Fool, and a Scornee, who makes it his Business to ridicule Religion, or bring it into Contempt, are only different Expressions, which may be indifferently apply'd to signify the same Person.

One Reason whereof, no doubt, is this, that the Scornee by such a Method, is sure to render himself not only Contemptible, but Odious; for since the Awe of a Deity, and a Sense of Religion are so deeply implanted in Human Nature, and so necessary to the common Interest and Happiness of Society, he who openly defies the Living God, and makes a Jest of Religion, at once opposes the Reason, and the Rights of all Mankind; and therefore 'tis no wonder that *Solomon* declares him, in the Words of my Text, to be an *Abomination to Men*.

But generally speaking, Sinners would appear to have a Sense of Piety and Religion; and tho' their inward Thoughts are very Wickedness, yet they think themselves concern'd in Point of Decency or Reputation, or some other Temporal Convenience of Religion, to dress themselves up in the counterfeit Disguise of it; as our Lord describes the *Pharisees*, that they outwardly appeared Righteous to Men, but inwardly were full of Hypocrisy and Iniquity, *Mat. xxiii. 28.*

And indeed most Men are in this Sense *Pharisees*; that they endeavour to conceal or dissemble their Vices, and make a fair Shew in the Flesh. But tho' by this means they may for a time im-

pose

pose upon others, or perhaps upon themselves, yet while the Bent of their Hearts is turn'd towards Sin, and they are under the Power of any vicious reigning Inclination, tho' to avoid Scandal, or out of any other Motive, they may be restrain'd from the outward Act of Sin, the Guilt of it shall notwithstanding be charg'd upon their Consciences: For in the Judgment of God, and indeed in the very Reason of the Thing, when we consider Man as a Moral and Free Agent, *the Thought of Foolishness is Sin.*

Leaving therefore the Scornier at present, to reflect on the Abomination he renders himself unto Men, as well as the Justice he so insolently provokes of an Almighty and Avenging God, I shall particularly apply my self to discourse to you on these Words, in the following Method.

(I.) I shall enquire what is meant by the Thought of Foolishness.

(II.) I shall lay down some proper Rules and Directions for the better Regulation of our Thoughts.

(I.) And First, I am to enquire what is meant by the Thought of Foolishness; Folly and Sin are Terms promiscuously us'd in Scripture to signify the same Thing; So that the Thought of Foolishness may in general import any such Thought as has Sin, or some sinful Action for its Object; but then 'tis plain, that in this *large* Sense of it, every such Thought shall not denominate a Man a Sinner, or be charg'd upon him as Criminal. And therefore, to prevent Mistakes, before I proceed to shew positively what is meant by a Thought of Foolishness, it may not be improper to observe to you by the way, what we are not to understand by it. And,

1. Thoughts

1. Thoughts of pure Speculation, when we consider the Nature of Sin in general, or the several aggravating Circumstances of any Sin in particular; when we would represent to ourselves or others, the Danger or Deformity of Vice in its proper Colours: Such Thoughts, I say, as they are simple Acts of the Understanding, without any irregular Motion or Consent of the Will, are so far from being sinful, that they sometimes become Matter of strict Duty; especially to Penitents, and to those whose peculiar Office it is to direct the Consciences of Men, and persuade them to Repentance.

And indeed the true Reason why Men are so often ensnared by the Deceitfulness of Sin, or continue in a sinful impenitent State, is, that they have not their Understandings exercis'd to discern both Good and Evil; for would they set the Evil of Sin before them in a true Light; would they pull off the flattering Disguise of it, and consider it as the great Scandal and Reproach of Human Nature, and the Cause of all other Evils and Disorders in the World; as the most base, and mean, and shameful thing Man can do, and the only thing provoking to God; such Reflections as these could not but lay many Restraints upon them from sinful and irregular Courses.

The Theory therefore of Sin, abstracting from all Motions of the Will towards it, is not the Thought of Foolishness here condemn'd as sinful? Indeed the Threats of God in Scripture against particular Sins, and his Expostulations with Sinners, suppose that the Knowledge of Sin in its several Kinds and Degrees is consistent with the infinite Purity and Perfection of his Nature.



Nature. So that when it is said, *He is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity*; the Words import no more than that he cannot see Sin with Complacency, or Approbation: But he sees it, which the Sinner will one Day feel, *as Sin*, that is, as the Object of his just Wrath and Vengeance; *For his Eyes are upon all our Ways, they are not hid from him, neither is our Iniquity hid from his Eyes,* Jer. xvi. 17.

And yet I would not hereby encourage such a Curiosity in the Search after Sin, tho' in pure Point of Speculation, as some of the *Romish* Doctors have justly been condemn'd for; for tho' they are very ingenious in putting nice and extraordinary Cases, yet it may be very much question'd, whether such a Method does not sometimes tend more to defile the Imagination, than to inform the Judgment of their Readers. The best Use that can be made of such Disquisitions, is, to shew how far a Man may be a Libertine without being a Sinner; but when we consider what thin Partitions divide the Bounds of Virtue and Vice, and how easy, how insensible, in a manner, the Transition is from the one to the other; certainly it concerns us rather to keep at a Distance from the imminent Danger, than to amuse our selves with curious Enquiries, how far we *may possibly* go with Safety.

But the worst of it is, when Authors, who give their Imagination too free a Scope in stating Cases of Conscience, fall into the Hands of vicious or ill-disposed Persons, they serve many times to excite or inflame those Passions, they pretend to regulate; which occasion'd this just Censure of an Excellent Casuist of our own  
(Bishop

[Bishop Sander] upon them, "That the loose  
 " Writings of the Prophane Poets are dull Tu-  
 " tors to Lust, compar'd with some of their au-  
 " thoriz'd Tomes.

2. Neither are we to understand by the  
 Thought of Foolishness, which is here con-  
 demn'd as sinful; a Thought of sudden and  
 transient Inclination towards Sin, which arises  
 in our Minds before we are aware, and which,  
 as soon as we can recollect our selves, we endea-  
 vour to stifle, or turn away from.

And the Reason of this is, that such Thoughts  
 are involuntary, and without any previous Con-  
 sent of the Will; nay, tho' we strive never so  
 much to make them off, they will still be hang-  
 ing upon us, and watching a thousand Oppor-  
 tunities of insinuating themselves.

Now the Actions of Men are no further mo-  
 rally Good or Evil, than they are done out of  
 Choice; when we do any thing without willing  
 or designing it, 'tis the Machine, 'tis the Ani-  
 mal that moves, and not the Man that acts.  
 And therefore in all such Cases, the Man can-  
 not properly be call'd a reasonable Agent, or be  
 denominat'd Virtuous or Vicious, from what he  
 does. This Principle of the Liberty of Human  
 Actions, is the Foundation of all Laws, and of  
 all Rewards and Punishments.

But then the Reason holds as well with respect  
 to those first, and involuntary Motions of the  
 Mind, which are call'd by the Schools, *Motus*  
*primo primi*, as to those natural Actions of the  
 Body, to which the Will does not formally con-  
 cur: Nay, we shall be so far from being con-  
 demn'd for those Thoughts of sudden Incur-  
 sion, which start up in our Minds, without or against

our Consent, that they afford us proper Opportunities for the Exercise of our Virtue, and for recommending our selves to the Favour of God, by making a Sacrifice of our irregular Inclinations, as soon as we apprehend them to be so.

Were it not for those natural Appetites God has given us to such Objects, as are grateful and agreeable to them, 'tis not easy to conceive how we could be under any Circumstances of Temptation; and therefore, if it be no Sin, as is evident from the Example of the Immaculate and Holy Jesus, to be tempted, then such Inclinations as naturally and insensibly arise in our Minds towards any agreeable, tho' forbidden Object, shall not, if we forthwith endeavour to suppress them, be charg'd upon us as sinful.

And yet I will own, the Thought of Foolishness may, in the very first Essay and Tendency of it, be in some Cases sinful; as where we do not carefully avoid such Occasions as are apt to excite any sinful Thoughts in our Minds; especially where we neglect to fortify our selves according to the Means Religion prescribes, of Prayer and Self-denial, and Watchfulness against all Temptations to the Sin, which more frequently, and more easily besets us.

In this Case, where, by the Grace of God, 'tis in our Power to prevent a Surprise, 'tis our own Fault; and we must answer for it, if we suffer our selves to be taken: And yet we are more culpable still, when we designedly put our selves in the way of Temptation, by using our natural Liberty for an Occasion of the Flesh; that is, when we indulge our Appetites in every thing, which we apprehend to be simply, and in its own Nature lawful, without any regard to the

the Measures of Expedience, or examining as we ought, whether such an Indulgence may not tend to heighten the Motions of Concupiscence, to take our Minds off from Heavenly and Religious Considerations, or make us have less Taste or Relish for them, and thereby lay us more open to the Impressions of evil Thoughts. The Guilt of such Thoughts shall certainly be charg'd upon us, in Proportion as we minister to the Occasion of them.

But above all, the Thoughts of Men are sinful in their first Rise and Tendency, when their Imagination has been long heated, or their Hearts corrupted by any criminal Excess or Disorders; or when they have apply'd their Minds to nothing so much as the Arts of gratifying their Passions, and inflaming them to a greater height. As such Thoughts proceed from a Habit of Sin, which the Sinner has wilfully contracted, and which they are the natural Growth and Product of, they cannot be properly call'd Involuntary, and therefore shall, without doubt, be charg'd upon him as sinful.

Having thus shewn, that by the Thought of Foolishness, which is here condemn'd as sinful, we are *not* to understand either a Thought of pure Speculation; or in general, of a sudden and transient Inclination: I proceed in the next place to shew, what we are to understand by it; and I shall reduce what I have to say upon this Point, under the following Distinction.

First, Of a Thought of Complacency: And,  
Secondly, Of a form'd and deliberate Intention.

I. By a Thought of Complacency, I understand such a Thought as the Will not only con-



sents to entertain, but the Mind delights to dwell and dilate it self upon.

The ambitious Man, for Instance, who aspires to any considerable Post or Employment in the World, pleases himself with thinking, when he has brought his Designs to bear, how he will be courted and caress'd, and admir'd by all that know him, or perhaps pointed at as he walks the Streets; how he will be in a Condition to insult, or revenge himself upon those that stood in his way; and with what a becoming Air of Disdain he will look back upon his Acquaintance or Neighbours, that he left at so vast a Distance behind him.

The Man of Pleasure entertains himself in as agreeable a manner with conceiving, how he would Revel in all the Delights of the Sons of Men; and what fine Opportunities he would have of proving Mirth, of knowing Madness and Folly, of walking in the Ways of his Heart, and the Sight of his Eyes, were he Master of a Fortune answerable to his Desires.

The Man of Violence and Injustice says in his Heart, Had I Power equal to my Will, how might I exalt my self against my Neighbour? And with what Ease might I hunt him down and devour him? What a fine Time should I have of it, in oppressing the poor righteous Man without a Cause, and without being oblig'd to give any other Reason for oppressing him, than that *my Strength is the Law of Justice; for that which is feeble is found to be nothing worth,* Wisdom ii. 11.

Again: The Man of the Earth, whose prevailing Temper is Covetousness, finds as agreeable Entertainment in such Thoughts and  
Amuse-

# S E R M O N IV. 69

Amusements as these: Could I project to make such a further Purchase, and which lies so convenient for me, what would the World say of my Dexterity and good Management? And how much should I rise still higher in the Eye of it, and my own Esteem? For 'tis to be consider'd, that Pride is generally at the Bottom of a covetous Temper; and that the great End which Persons of such a Temper propose to themselves in growing still more Rich, is only that they may be *thought* so: But if the Humour of the covetous Person lie more for Hoarding up, then possibly he may please himself with putting these and the like Questions: Could I propose to lay by such a Sum, how cautious would I be, that no Importunity of Friends, that no Occasion whatever of other People, or my own, should induce me to break it? What Satisfaction will it give me to take a Turn now and then to visit the Ark wherein I have deposited the God of this World; and sometimes to gratify my Eyes so far, as to look into it, and take a View of his Divinity, lest by some secret way or other he should have slipp'd out, and made his Escape? Such possibly, among others as ridiculous, may be the Thoughts of a covetous Wretch, who has no Heart, no Design to do Good, or rejoice with the Portion God has given him in his Life, but seems only to contrive how those he designs any good to at last, may rejoice at his Death.

Now these several kinds of Thoughts I have mention'd, tho' Men only feed their Imagination with them, and take a sensible Pleasure in projecting what they might do under such and such Circumstances of Life, without coming to

## 70 SERMON IV.

any fix'd or settled Resolution of doing it; there is no doubt, I say, but such Thoughts are really sinful and offensive to God, and that upon the following Accounts.

1. As such Thoughts are sinful in their Cause and Original; they proceed out of a Heart already corrupted, and in a State of Disorder; *A corrupt Tree bringeth forth evil Fruit*: So these evil Thoughts, which our Minds are most apt to run upon, proceed from some vicious reigning Passion, or perhaps presumptuous Sin, which has got the Dominion over us; and therefore *Solomon* observes, *That as a Man thinketh in his Heart, so is he*, Prov. xxiii. 6. i. e. according to the general Current, or prevailing Subject of a Man's Thoughts, he may be able to form a Judgment of his spiritual State, and what Order he is in, with respect to Religion. Accordingly the Prophet *Isaiah* makes it the Condition of that true and sincere Repentance, which restores Sinners to the Favour of God; that they not only forsake their Sins, but banish out of their Minds all pleasing Ideas and Hankerings after them: *Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord*, Isa. lv. 7. For indeed,

2. To give way to such vain and foolish Thoughts, is an Argument of a Mind very much turn'd and estrang'd from God: Did we love the Supreme Being as we are commanded, *with all our Hearts, and with all our Minds*, we should chiefly employ our Thoughts in such Meditations, as would bring us nearer to him; not such, as still separate us further from him: We should endeavour after such a holy Frame and Temper of Mind, as is most agreeable to the

the Purity and Perfection of his Nature, and not give Entertainment to such Thoughts as defile the Mind, and render it Carnal; a Temper of Mind, which the Apostle expressly tells us, *is Enmity to God.*

3. Such impure and loose Thoughts, when they give us any sensible Pleasure or Delightation, are directly contrary to the Fruits of the Holy Spirit; and therefore the State of a Man, who is mov'd and walks by the Spirit, is oppos'd by the Apostle, to that of a Man whose Heart is corrupted with sensual Lusts. Thus he argues upon those two different States, *Gal. v. 17. The Flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the Flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other.* And indeed, 'tis impossible to conceive, how those, whose Minds are enlightn'd by the Spirit of God, and who have tasted of his heavenly Gift, should deliberately admit any unholy or impure Thoughts, much less entertain them with Pleasure and Complacency; and therefore, at the 24th Verse, it is made the distinguishing Character of all true and genuine Disciples of Christ, that they not only abstain from all actual Sins of the Flesh, but from the very Motions, and irregular Desires of it. *And they that are Christ's have crucify'd the Flesh, with the Affections and Lusts.*

4. Such foolish and vain Imaginations are directly contrary to all those Divine Precepts in Holy Scripture, which require us to be Heavenly and Spiritually-minded; to be renew'd in the Spirit of our Mind; to purify our Hearts from all Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit; and in a word, to Watch and Pray, that we enter not into Temptation: Whereas, to take Pleasure in such



Thoughts, supposing them otherways innocent, is to put our selves directly in the way of Temptation, and the most dangerous Way, too; because we are never sooner weary or overcome, than we fight against *Pleasure*.

I have been more Particular in proving it unlawful for us to entertain our Thoughts upon any Sin with Complacency, because it may be fear'd, that a great many Persons (otherways well and piously disposed) are apt to think, so they do but abstain from the grosser and external Acts of Sin, there can be no great Harm in thinking of it, tho' with some degree of Pleasure and Delight.

But let any Person, who thinks he may innocently enough suffer his Imagination to play with sinful or forbidden Objects, and represent them to his Mind under all the pleasing Forms and Appearances it can give them; let him, I say, but examine the Lawfulness of such imaginary Scenes of Wickedness by the Rules I have laid down, and I'm persuaded, he must agree with me, That the Thought of Foolishness, with any sensible Delectation, tho' without any Design of acting it, is not only a very dangerous Snare and Temptation to Sin, but highly sinful in its self. But then it must be granted,

2. That a Thought of form'd and deliberate Intention, is that which renders the Sinner criminal, in the highest degree, and which shall be charg'd upon him, as if the Sin had been actually committed: 'Tis thought agreeable to the Justice of our Laws, that it should be High Treason, and punish'd as such, for a Subject to imagine the Death of the Prince, where such Imagination

gination can be made appear by any Overt-Act. But God, to whom all Hearts are open, and all Desires known, needs no external Evidence to discover our secret Designs or Machinations. And a Sinner, who is only restrain'd from the outward Act of Sin, for want of Opportunity, or for fear of Disgrace, or any other Temporal Consideration, which does not affect his Conscience, shall be reputed, before the Tribunal of Heaven, as guilty of the Fact.

And the Reason of this is, *That out of the Heart are the Issues of Life.* 'Tis the Mind, not the bodily Members, as was before observ'd, that Sins; because the Mind only is capable of that Liberty and Freedom of Choice, which is necessary to the Morality of our Actions: The Body is not capable of chusing the Good, or refusing the Evil. We may indeed fly from any sinful Object, or draw near and unite our selves to it with the Body; but 'tis not the Motion of the Body, but of the Soul which moves the Body, that renders such an Object sinful. Those, who in Times of Persecution, were forced with their Hands to offer Incense to Idols, while with their Mouths they confessed the true God, and in their Hearts abhor'd the Violence, were far from being guilty of Idolatry; for no Action can be Good or Evil, Blameable or Praise-worthy, any further than 'tis Voluntary. There is not a more evident Truth in the World; and therefore we may observe in Scripture, that the Reason of God's punishing Sinners, is not only ascribed to their wicked Deeds, but to the Corruption of their Hearts, and the inward State and Disorder of their Minds, as the original Source from whence their evil Actions took their

# 74 SERMON IV.

their Rise. Thus 'tis assign'd as the moving Cause why God sent a Deluge upon the Earth, to destroy all Mankind, except one righteous Family, from the Face of it; That he saw the Wickedness of Man was great in the Earth, and that every Imagination of the Thoughts of his Heart was only Evil continually. Accordingly God threatens the Jews by the Prophet Jeremiah, Chap. vi. 19. that he will bring Evil upon them, even the Fruit of their Thoughts, because they hearkned not unto his Words, nor to his Law, but rejected it. Thus the visible Impiety and Profaneness of Sinners, and the Reason of God's Punishing them, are directly ascrib'd to their ungodly and sinful Thoughts. These are they which our Saviour expressly tells us, *defile the Man*; and the Reason why they do so, is, because they proceed from the Heart, i. e. from the Will, and Affections.

But our Lord has particularly determin'd this Point in the Case of lascivious and unchaste Desires, in Opposition to a very corrupt Notion, which yet generally prevail'd at that Time among the Jews; they thought, that except it were in case of Idolatry, no Sin was committed by the bare Intention, without some Overt-Act. The Learned Josephus himself gave into this popular Error; speaking of Antiochus his intended Sacrilege, he lays it down as a Rule, That to have design'd only, and not acted, does not deserve Punishment. Τὸ δὲ μηχανέτι πῶτος τὸ ἔργον βλασφημῶν, ἐκ δὲ τιμωρίας ἔστιν.

Our Blessed Saviour, to confute so dangerous an Error, and restore the Sense of the Seventh and Tenth Commandments to their original Meaning and Purity, instructs us by this particular

cular Instance of an incontinent Look, (*Mat. v. 28.*) That the Design of those Commandments is to restrain all loose and inordinate Affections; and that he who acts any Crime whatever in the Desire of his Heart, or if I may so speak, upon the Scene of his Imagination, is really, and to all Intents and Purposes, as we may say, guilty of it before God, and his own Conscience; And yet 'tis certainly a Happiness, whatever our criminal Desires or Intentions are, to be restrain'd from acting them; and we ought to bless God for any preventing Providence, which has put us under so happy a Restraint; not only as we may, perhaps, hereby avoid giving Scandal, or doing Injury to others, but because the Act of Sin is commonly attended and inflam'd with stronger Impressions of it, and more dangerous Consequences with respect to our spiritual State: But still, if all these aggravating Circumstances could be supposed to be really in the Intention of the Sinner, then, I say, and 'tis all I would be thought to say, he is certainly as culpable and guilty in *foro Conscientia*, as if he had proceeded to Action. Having thus consider'd at large, what we are to understand by a Thought of Foolishness, I proceed,

2. In the Second Place, to lay down some proper Rules and Directions for the better Regulation of our Thoughts.

1. And the First Rule I shall prescribe to this End is, that we should take care to be always one way or other, usefully, or at least innocently employ'd; for the Soul is an active Being, and must always, while we are awake, and if the



the Essence of it be *Cogitation*, even while we are asleep, be thinking on something or other: So that if the Mind be not busy'd in attending upon the more proper and noble Exercises of Reason, or, however, upon the innocent and ordinary Affairs of Human Life, it will naturally turn itself to vain or sinful Amusements. And probably, this may be one Reason, why God has put so great a part of Mankind under a Necessity of Labour and Industry for their Subsistence; that their Minds being in some Measure taken up with the Duties of their several Callings, they may not be so much at Liberty to entertain or encourage vicious Thoughts; for few Persons have Strength of Mind to undergo the Labour of Attention, to Enquiries purely Speculative and Rational; and fewer still, in a State where sensible Objects press so hard on every side upon them, are willing to be at that Pains: As to those who are not under the same Necessity of servile Occupations and Employments, they have so many ways of rendering themselves useful to the World, and of being qualify'd to that End, that be who they will, they can never have any Time lying upon their Hands, for want of Business. And indeed, the great Scandal of Ignorance, and want of Politeness in such Persons, makes it particularly incumbent on them, to cultivate and enrich their Minds with a competent Stock of Knowledge in all the more generous and practicable Parts of it; and as they have more Opportunities to be rich in good Works, they ought to consider it as their proper Employment, to exert themselves in doing Acts of Humanity and Beneficence. There is no Character, whatever, which renders

renders Men more insignificant and little in the Eye of the World, than that of Idleness; we have known very vicious Persons, by a diligent Application to Business, and a fine Capacity for it, raise themselves to the first Posts of Honour and Profit, and stand before Kings; but an idle Person, who has no regard to what he owes to himself, or the Society he is born into; who places his chief Happiness, as *Epicurus* did that of his Gods, in doing, or if the Expression may be allow'd, in *thinking of nothing*; such a Man, I say, tho' he is not in all respects so great an Abomination to Men as the Scorners, yet is on many Accounts more despicable.

But this is not what I was directly to observe; my Business is to shew, that Idleness lays us very open to the Impressions of evil Thoughts, and that the Tempter is never so busy with us, as when we have nothing to do our selves. While Men slept, the Enemy took the Opportunity of *Sowing his Tares*, Mat. xiii. 25. Idleness enervates the Powers of the Mind, takes us off our Guard, and exposes us more defenceless to every Temptation that comes in our way. *I went,* says Solomon, *by the Field of the Slothful, and by the Vineyard of the Man void of Understanding; And lo, it was all grown over with Thorns, and Nettles had covered the Face thereof*, Prov. xxiv. 30, 31. The Words may be explain'd in a literal Sense; but as 'tis usual for the inspir'd Pen-men to shadow heavenly and spiritual Things, by sensible Representations, so no Question Solomon had a further and more noble Design in these Words; namely, to shew us that there is nothing more apt to choak and destroy the good Seed of Religion, or contribute to the Growth of all manner

## 78. SERMON IV.

ner of Sin and Impiety, than a Habit of Idleness.

As we would therefore not be guilty of sinful Thoughts, let us take care to be employ'd as constantly as may be, to one good Purpose or another; or if we allow our selves in any innocent Respites and Diversions from more serious Employments, let them be such as no ways tend to dissipate or weaken the Force of the Mind, but only to refresh it; and thereby make us more lively and chearful in our after-Applications to the several Duties of our Calling, especially to the spiritual Acts and Exercises of Religion.

2. Let us carefully examine what those Things are which have been most apt to excite evil Thoughts in us heretofore, and let us as carefully avoid all Occasions of them for the future. Now if we observe it, our Thoughts generally turn upon one or more of these Springs; the Company we converse with; the Books we read; the Circumstances of Life we are in; or prevailing natural Temperament.

1. Then, let us refrain such Company, as we would any other dangerous Infection, which we have observ'd has been any ways instrumental in corrupting our Minds with ill Principles, or disposing us to ill Practices: Ill Examples, especially such as are frequently before us, and become familiar to our Minds, slide insensibly into the Heart; we are strangely and even mechanically form'd for Imitation; and the very Air of a Man's Face, or vehement manner of expressing himself, sometimes moves and penetrates and convinces more, though we do not well know of what, than all the Reason and Eloquence

quence in the World of a Person less assuming, or less agitated.

This strong Impression which the Force of Imagination in other People is apt to make upon our own, is the Occasion of innumerable Errors as well as Vices: the best way to free our selves from the Contagion of both, is to avoid such Conversation, as we have found by former Experience, has any ways tended to give us loose Notions of Religion, or to delude us with false but specious perhaps, and flattering Images of the Pleasures of Sense, and the Poms of this wicked World; let us not walk any longer in the Way of such dangerous Persons, *but refrain our Feet from their Paths*, Prov. 1. 15;

2. Evil Thoughts sometimes arise from the Subject Matter of the Books we chiefly addict our selves to read; and it must be confess'd, to the great Scandal of Religion, that the World abounds not only with Atheistical Books, but what I principally have an Eye to at present, Books of a loose and immoral Strain; I need not mention any of them, they are generally too well known, and in too many Hands; and those that read them may be sensible that 'tis not without Reason I caution Persons, who would preserve their Innocence and Purity of Intention, against reading them. They are writ on purpose to inspire the *Thoughts of Foolishness*, and to open a Door to all manner of Licentiousness and Disorder; to this End they give us false Ideas of Honour, of Friendship, and Love, but in such a Disguise, that weak Minds do not always see through it: And indeed such Books are generally read most by those, upon whom they are likely to have the worst Effects; by young, raw thought-



thoughtless Persons, who are taken with the agreeable Delusion, without apprehending themselves in Danger, and all of a sudden find their Minds full of a thousand vain, and foolish, and extravagant Passions.

The Encouragement which these Books, that are purely address'd to the Imagination, meet with in the World, is the more culpable, when we consider how many excellent Books for the Improvement of our Reason in all the useful Parts of Knowledge, are every where to be met with. As to Books of Religion, there were never so many, nor perhaps ever any so good, or so well calculated for general Instruction, since the Apostolical Age; there are others no less proper to further and assist us in all the Parts and Offices of a devout Life; and others again, upon the highest Points of Theology, writ with all the Clearness, and Beauty, and Strength of Reasoning, which may be proper to entertain the more Knowing and Inquisitive. So that so far as human Compositions can conduce to that End, and by the Grace of God they are subservient to it, there is nothing wanting to make the Man of God perfect in the Attainments both of his Knowledge and his Zeal.

As the Encouragement therefore, which we give to evil Thoughts to enter into our Minds, proceeds from our want of Knowledge or Zeal, 'twould be a good Rule in order to prevent them, to employ our selves frequently in Reading good Books; or whenever we happen to be surpriz'd with any *Thought of Foolishness*, as after all our Care we may be, perhaps we cannot use a better Method to free our selves from it, than by taking one Author or other, for whom we have

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a particular Veneration, into our Hands; but especially, by having recourse to that holy and divine Book, wherein God himself speaks to us, and which for that reason is above all others, *proper for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness, 2 Tim. iii. 16.*

2. Evil Thoughts sometimes arise by occasion of the Particular Circumstances of Life we are in: Temptations are incident to us in every State and Condition of Life in this World; but it must be granted, there are some particular Callings and Employments, which are both reputed, and are really in themselves more dangerous Tryals of our Virtue and Innocence; and tho' they are not, strictly speaking, in their own Nature unlawful, yet they border so near upon what is so, that it requires a great deal of Christian Prudence, as well as Piety, to keep within their proper Bounds.

If your own Choice, or that of your Parents, has put you upon any such Employment, you ought, as it is attended with more unhappy Circumstances of Temptations, to be the more careful and circumspect in the Discharge of it: Do not think, tho' such Thoughts are too common and ordinary, that it may be lawful for you to take all the Advantages you can by fraudulent and indirect Arts, by Lying and Dissimulation, by Violence and Oppression, under a Pretence, that such Methods are agreeable to the Nature of your Calling, that they enter into the Mysteries of it, which you were for a long Time train'd up in, and that they are practis'd without Scruple by others of your Fraternity; but remember that the Laws of God, whereby you must judge of your Conduct here, and be judg'd

your selves hereafter, make no distinction in favour of any sinful Practice, whatever Circumstances or Way of Life the Sinner may be in; but the Command of keeping Innocency, and doing the thing that is right, indifferently oblige and extend to all Men; nay to excuse any Arts of unjust Gain from the Nature of our particular Calling, is attended with this further very aggravating Circumstance of Guilt; that 'tis a secret Reproach on the Providence of God, as if he had not sufficiently provided for the necessary or comfortable Support of Men in their several Occupations, without putting them under a Necessity of having recourse to sinful Arts. The Reason of this Caution will best appear to Men of Trade, or considerable Dealings in the World, or to such, perhaps, who make the Law their Profession.

4. Evil Thoughts frequently arise from prevailing natural Temperament: There are few Persons, to whom Nature has not given a particular Byass to some Vice, or Vices more than to others; and the Images of such Vices do not only find a more easy and frequent Admission into our Minds, but we are strangely apt to think, that as they are so deeply rooted in our Constitution, they are the unavoidable Effects of it; and that God, who knows whereof we are made, will at last make very merciful Allowances to them: But we ought to consider that our Reason is given us for the Regulation of our Passions, and that besides the Means, which Reason prescribes all Men, by proper Acts of self-Denial and Reflection, in order to subdue even their predominant Passions, we Christians have the Promise of a supernatural Grace,

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to supply all our natural Weakness and Defects, and to render those Means still *more* efficacious; and, blessed be God, in the use of those Means, a great many Christians, and several of them now with God, have overcome the strongest and most violent Propensions of natural Temper; and if we would make use of the same means, and with the same Sincerity and Disposition of Mind, no doubt but we should experience the same Effect.

If it was the Glory of *Socrates*, that from a Temper, as he acknowledged himself, naturally Vicious and Perverse, he had by a good use of his Reason and Liberty, acquir'd the Habit of all those Virtues, which are the proper Beauties and Ornaments of Human Nature: What a Reproach will it be to us Christians, who live under a covenanted State of Grace, to think of excusing our Disorders from the prevailing Force of *Natural Temper*? How much more is it incumbent on us to *bring into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ*? 2 Cor. x. 5.

But yet, if we have been so unhappy as to strengthen the *complectional Vice*, the Sin which more easily besets us, by a dangerous Habit of it, it will still concern us the more (if we would preserve our Minds from evil Thoughts) to endeavour the Conquest of it. When the Imagination has been long defiled by repeated Acts of any Sin, 'twill not only be hard for Men to wash out the Stains of it, but at first a Work very painful and unpleasant: But still, by the Grace of God, the Difficulty of it may be overcome, and the Current of our Thoughts, by contrary Acts of Virtue and Religion, be turn'd another way; and when we have thus got the



Victory over any sinful Habit, and are renew'd in the Spirit of our Minds, the Pains we have taken to this End, will be abundantly recompensed, by the Pleasures of Innocency and a good Conscience; but above all, if God think us worthy of so great a Favour, by the sensible and inward Delights of his Grace.

And here it may not be improper to enquire, whether all such evil Thoughts, as proceed from a Habit of Sin, are directly, in their first Rise or Tendency, sinful? To which I answer, I conceive they are not. When a Sinner is once pardon'd by the Grace of God, it seems reasonable to believe, that all the natural and unavoidable Effects of his Sin should be pardon'd with it; otherwise, indeed, no Person, that by his Words or Actions, or Writings, has been the occasion of misleading others into Sin or Error, can certainly know, whether God will pardon him, upon the strongest Evidences of a sincere Repentance; because 'tis impossible for him to know, how far the ill Effects of his Conversation, or Example, or the ill Principles he has publickly advanc'd, may reach; 'tis probable, they may be attended with unhappy Consequences even after his Death. And therefore, when I said before, that the first, tho' involuntary Motions of our Minds to Sin, are sinful, because they are the natural Growth and Product of those ill Habits we have wilfully contracted; I would only be understood, that such Primary Motions shall be imputed to us as Sins, while we continue under the Power of the Habit which occasions them, or have not sincerely repented of it; but where we have, there, I suppose, we are not answerable for all the Consequences of such a

Habit,

Habit, and particularly for those ill Thoughts which will be often presenting themselves to the Minds of the truest Penitents.

I speak this for the Satisfaction and Ease of such Persons who having been reclaim'd from some prevailing and habitual Sin, tho' they strive never so much against all After-Thoughts or Returns of Inclination to it, yet they cannot wholly free their Minds from them: This makes them doubt the Sincerity of their Repentance, and conclude that they are not in a State of Grace, or Favour with God.

But this is a very wrong and false Conclusion; for God, when he pardons a Penitent the Sin of his Soul, does not work Miracles upon his Body; the Spirits will naturally, and as it were mechanically, take their Courses in the Brain at the Sight, or by any other Occasion of the Object, whereby it has been frequently mov'd. When we Pray to God with the greatest Fervency; when we receive the blessed Sacrament with the most holy and heavenly Dispositions, we do not find our Devotions have any visible Effect in curing us of our bodily Distempers. Now such evil Thoughts as proceed from former Habits of Sin, are no other; the Wounds which the Brain has receiv'd, can no more be cur'd, than ordinarily those of the Body, without leaving some Scar behind them. But tho' 'tis just Matter of Humiliation to us, that we are liable to Impressions of this Nature, by occasion of the Sins we have formerly contracted a Habit of, we have great Reason to hope they shall not, so far as they are involuntary, be imputed to us as sinful.

But here, again, another Difficulty, and the greatest of all arises, how far Thoughts of this kind are voluntary, and whether the Will may not be said to be in a manner over-ru'd in the Consent it gives to them? 'Tis impossible to determine this Question precisely, except we had a perfect Knowledge of the Force and Mechanical Powers of Habits, which perhaps we shall never have, while we are in the Body; but this we know, that when the Brain receives any violent Concussion from an Object familiar to it, we have very little Power for the Time over our Thoughts; and tho' I will not say, we are faultless in giving way to the Shock, tho' for a Moment; yet if we endeavour, as soon as possible, to recover our selves, 'tis to be hop'd, a merciful God will reckon even such a transient Consent of the Will, among those other Infirmities of our Nature, which he will not be extreme, in charging to our Account.

If Thoughts, which arise in the Minds of sincere Converts, from the Power of any former Habits of Sin, will admit of these mitigating Circumstances; much less ought People to abandon themselves to Despair, upon the account of such Thoughts, as arise either from Diabolical Suggestion, or an ill Habit of Body: For tho' this is sometimes the Case of Persons, who are possess'd of a great many fine natural Endowments; and who, in their more sober Intervals, will talk very solidly and rationally on every thing, but what relates to their own Distemper: for on that side they are perfectly blind: Yet we are not to conclude from hence, that in this particular Instance they have any free Power over their own Thoughts; nay, there is a great deal of

of reason to conclude the contrary, on this very account, that in all other Cases they are so capable of reasoning, and being reason'd with. This, I say, is an Argument to every Body about them, and ought to be so to themselves, that there is some Strong preternatural Turn of their Brain in that particular Instance, whereby they may be said to be carry'd on to wicked or blasphemous Thoughts, rather perhaps spontaneously, than with that free Consent of the Will, which is necessary to denominate a Moral Action.

There are not many Persons, with whom, after some free Conversation with them, we do not find something wrong: We are amaz'd that Men of many bright and excellent Qualifications, should sometimes have a cast of Thought or Behaviour, so different from their general Character. This proceeds either from some natural Defect, or super-induc'd Habit, which is very difficultly, if perhaps possibly, to be corrected; and therefore, when we know any Person's Foible, we are generally more dispos'd to pardon him the Errors or Indecencies it betrays him into; he has an odd way with him, we say, but he cannot help it. Now, this *something wrong*, this strange *cast* of *Mind*, is only in the melancholy Person in a higher Degree, and a more unhappy Instance; occasion'd by some particular Habit of Body, which the Tempter, who always knows his Advantage, and how to make use of it, strikes in with to promote his Designs, and Enmity against God. Yet, as Persons under these wicked Suggestions, may be rather said to suffer, than to act them, as being in the highest Measure, if not altogether Passive,



# 88 SERMON IV.

there is great reason to hope; that they shall find more Favour in the Judgment of a merciful God, than they do at present in their own.

Having, to obviate some Mistakes, thought this no improper Digression, I proceed to advise,

4. That, in order to the better Government of our Thoughts, we would live under a constant Sense of God's Presence and Inspection over us. How should we be ashamed and confounded, were other Men, tho' of like Passions with our selves, conscious to our Thoughts; could they see what passes within us, and how many vain and trifling, foolish and vicious Inclinations our Minds are agitated with; how we go to and fro in the Earth, fancying our selves *this* and *that*, and executing a Thousand impracticable and chimerical Projects. 'Tis impossible to enumerate the several ridiculous Thoughts in this kind, wherewith the Imagination amuses it self; yet we please our selves, that whatever the inward State and Disorder of our Minds may be, those we converse with know nothing of the Matter. And indeed, 'tis very wisely design'd by Providence, that we cannot see one another's Thoughts; for if, notwithstanding all the Arts of Hypocrisy and Dissimulation, Men cannot on many occasions forbear rendering themselves distastful or offensive, how intolerable should we appear to one another, were all our vain and aspiring, our envious and revengeful, our covetous or carnal Thoughts laid open without Disguise?

But

But why are we so careful, not only to hide our secret criminal Inclinations, but to put out the false Colours of Virtue? *He that made the Eye shall he not see? And if he do see shall he not Punish? Hell and Destruction are before the Lord: How much more then the Hearts of the Children of Men?* Prov. xv. 11.

'Tis a common Saying indeed, that *Thoughts are Free*; and with respect to any cognizance Men can take of them, they are so: But if we mean hereby that we are free to let our Thoughts run indifferently on all kind of Subjects, and to entertain viscious, as well as innocent and virtuous Inclinations, without offending God, in whose Presence we always are, and to whom all Things are naked and open; our Thoughts are so far from being free in this Sense, that, as I have particularly shewn, it is the *Freedom* of them that makes them sinful.

Let us then, by setting God always before us, be more effectually persuaded to make this good and proper use of our Liberty, that tho' we are free indeed to entertain good or evil Thoughts, yet we may always chuse the better Part, and employ our Minds in such a useful and pious manner, as may tend most to the Perfection of our Nature, and the Improvement of our Christian Graces. - But,

5. And lastly, All these Rules and Directions will avail but little towards the better Government of our Thoughts, without the illuminating and sanctifying Graces of the Spirit of God: Of our selves, we shall still, whatever we may design, be unable *to think any thing as of our selves*; that is, any thing in that pious manner, and with that Purity of Intention we ought.

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Let us therefore, particularly pray, that God, in order to preserve us from all *Thoughts of Foolishness*, and to inspire us with such *Thoughts* as are *Perfective* of our Nature, and pleasing to him; would by his holy Spirit illuminate our *Understandings*, and Purify our *Hearts*, and that he would give us the *Grace* both of *Light* and *Sense*; of *Light*, to direct our *Minds* in all holy and devout *Meditations*; and of *Sense*, to render such *Meditations* the more grateful and delightful to us.

I shall conclude all with the Words of the Apostle, *Phil. iv. 8. Finally, Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praise, think on these things.*

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## SERMON

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# SERMON V.

The Reasons why the Scorners incurs  
so general an Odium; and of the  
Distinction of Moral Good and  
Evil.

PROV. xxiv. 9.  
*And the Scorners is an Abomination to Men.*

I Have already explain'd to you the Words immediately foregoing, *The Thought of Foolishness is Sin*: And taken Occasion from them to lay down some useful Directions for the better Regulation of our Thoughts: And tho' I said something by the way, of the Odium which the Scorners so justly and so generally incurs by his Impiety and Prophaneness; yet it may not be amiss to discourse of the Words before me in a more large and particular Manner. For tho' Men of this Character are not so numerous, as those, who may stand in need of Advice in relation to the Government of their Thoughts; because the very best of Men, God knows, are apt sometimes to think on what they should not; yet,



yet, as it is the great Business of the Scorners; not only to bring Contempt upon Religion, and every thing that is Sacred, but to corrupt and seduce others by his loose Principles: What I have to say, may, by the Blessing of God, be in some measure useful, if not to reclaim the Scorners, yet to prevent his prophane Raillery and Reasoning, if he pretend to it, from having any ill Effect upon other People.

To which End, I shall, in discoursing on these Words, *The Scorners is an Abomination to Men*, observe the following Method.

I. I shall attempt to give you a short View and Description of him.

II. I shall observe from it, how justly he renders himself an Abomination to Men.

III. I shall make some useful Improvements, by way of Conclusion from the Whole.

*First*, My Business, in the first Place, is to give you a short View and Description of the Scorners; for indeed to draw him at length, and consider him in all the ways he takes to dishonour God and Religion, and to disgrace himself, would neither be very instructive, nor decent. I shall therefore only touch upon some of the great and principal Lines of his Character.

I. Then, he is one who runs counter to the general Reason and Maxims whereby the rest of Mankind govern themselves; for instead of avoiding the Occasions of publick Scandal or Offence to the World, he values himself upon running a greater Length in the Ways of Sin and Impiety, than any before him, and if it be possible, perhaps, than any that can come after him.

*Solo-*

Solomon seems to have been in this Disposition, when he laid aside the Regards of Religion, and gave himself up to know Madness and Folly; *What can the Man do,* says he, *that cometh after the King?* 'Tis true, he speaks these Words in the Person of a Penitent, and with a design to shew us, that if he who had all the Advantages of Power and Wealth to command the sinful Pleasures of this World, and of Knowledge to improve and refine his Taste of them, could yet make no other Report from his vicious Excesses, but that they were all Vanity and Vexation of Spirit: Much less could Sinners of inferior Quality and Consideration propose to find any true or tolerable Satisfaction in a sinful Course of Life. Yet 'tis highly probable, the Question Solomon puts in *these Words*, was at the bottom of his Heart, when he liv'd in such open and notorious Contempt of the Laws of God, when he was laying his Design of exceeding all that went before him, in all manner of irregular Gratifications, 'twas a natural Thought enough for him to project how he might at the same Time, and in the same Kind, outdo all that should come after him.

Thus the Scorners places his greatest Glory in those Disorders which the rest of Mankind are most ashamed of; upon this View he studies Vice as *an Art*, and his Thoughts are taken up with enquiring how far the Improvement of it may be carry'd. He affects to be thought the Author of some new Discovery in the *Theory* of Sin, or to do some eminent Service towards promoting the Practice of it; and yet so inconsistent is he in his Character, that he seems the furthest of any Man living from a Spirit of Ambition;

bition, his Inventions being sometimes such, as render it indecent for other People to call him by his own Name.

But his reigning Passion for Scandal in general, and the Desire he has to leave one Monument or other of his Impieties behind him, is superior to all the private Regards he owes to himself or Family. If the Scorners be not so ingenious as to find out some extraordinary or new Method of Sinning, then he contents himself, where ever he goes, with playing the Fool, and doing something or other in Contempt of Morality or Religion, that may at least be talk'd of in the Neighbourhood. Thus the Author of the Book of Wisdom introduces the Scorners of his Age; *Let none of us go without our Part of Voluptuousness, let us leave Tokens of our Joyfulness, or sinful and extravagant Pleasures, in every Place,* Wisd. ii. 9.

2. The Scorners is one who delights to walk in the way of Sinners, that is, to accompany with them, and none but them; and indeed none but they are fit to accompany with him. For tho' 'tis the Duty of Good Men in many Cases to converse with Sinners, in order to their Reproof or Amendment, when there is any Prospect of doing good upon them; yet the Scorners, *who will none of their Reproof*, or who declares he will not here a Word of Religion or Jesus Christ, is not a proper Subject, while he is in such a Temper, for any charitable Addresses or Admonitions. Accordingly, Solomon tells us, *Prov. ix. 7, 8.* He that *reproveth a Scorners*, not only gets *shame to himself*, but incurs his Hatred: And for this Reason, because the Scorners hates those that reprove him, he industriously avoids  
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the Conversation of those, whose Duty it is to do so. Thus again, *Chap. xv. 12.* we are told, *A Scornor loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.* 'Tis true, he cannot always avoid the Conversation of Persons well and religiously dispos'd; but his manner of treating Religion, and the scornful Airs he puts on when he talks of it, looks as if he had rather a Right to reprove those who have devoted themselves to its Service.

3. Though the Scornor really believe in his Heart there is a God; for this is a Principle which Men, let them pretend what they will, can never clearly get quit of, yet he would be thought to believe there is no God, or at least no Providence; no God, that looketh down from Heaven to see what is done among the Children of Men. And therefore, though he mention the Name of God sometimes, 'tis either with a direct Design to dishonour and prophane it, or as an expletive to supply the want of other Words, and fill up the Breaks of his Discourse; or because perhaps he has brought himself under such a Habit of Swearing and Prophaneness, that his Oaths come insensibly from him.

4. The Scornor particularly delights himself in Ridiculing those Persons or Things that have a more immediate Relation to God, or are in some peculiar Manner set apart for his Service. Thus 'tis the great Triumph of his Wit, to apply any known Saying, or more remarkable Idiom in the Holy Scriptures, to some common and trivial Affair; or to plead the Examples of good Men recorded in them, in favour of those particular Sins, which they were so unhappy as to fall into. So that if the Scornor read the Holy

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dy Scriptures, as his Curiosity perhaps may sometimes lead him, 'tis not with a Design agreeable to the End for which they were written, to correct his own Errors or Vices; but to find some pretence for supporting his loose Principles, and excusing at least his vicious Habits: In a word, he reads the Scriptures rather with an Intention to find Fault with them, than to have his own Faults discovered or reprov'd by them.

But the greatest Effort of the Scorners is against that Order Men, whose peculiar Office it is to minister in Things pertaining to God; for he is sensible while that Reverence and Esteem for this sacred Order is kept up in the World, which is due to it, Religion cannot altogether lose its Awe and Authority: Especially in an Age, wherein the Labours of Christ's Vineyard are so ordinarily qualified with all the Advantages of useful Learning, and of a chaste, solid and persuasive Way of Reasoning.

This above all Things is ready to break the Heart of the Scorners, that he sees an Order of Men promoting the great Interests of Religion in the Name of God, and by an Authority deriv'd from him, in Reputation and Esteem with the best, and wisest, and greatest Part of Mankind. He sees them not only able to defend the true Principles of Religion, and just Rights of their Order against all his Sophistry and little Cavils; but he sees them, by the Blessing of God, upon their Labours, instrumental in turning many to Righteousness, and bringing others (that have err'd or been deceiv'd, perhaps by his false Suggestions) into the Way of Truth. But,

5. and *Lastly*, The Scorner makes it his Business to confound the Distinction of Virtue and Vice, to call Evil good, and Good evil, to put Bitter for sweet, and Sweet for bitter. And therefore his only standing Principle, if it may be call'd so, is, that Men ought to act by no Principle at all, except that of Self-Interest and Preservation; in all other Cases they may observe a perfect Neutrality. But whatever conduces to these Ends, provided they can employ it with Impunity, and keep themselves out of the Reach of the Law, that the Scorner accounts lawful; and all the Difference, in his Opinion, between Good and Evil lies in this, That he who cannot cheat and dissemble, and defraud either private Persons, or when he is in a Post fit for it, the Publick, without being found out, is a Knave and a Fool; but on the other Hand, he that can do all these Things with a good Grace, or manage Matters so well, that there is no coming at him, why such a one is a very wise and good Man. And indeed, there is all the Reason in the World to think him so, if Self-love be the only Rule of our Conduct; if our Reason, as the Scorner would have it, be of no use to us, but only to purvey for the Body, and we have nothing to take care of, but *to make Provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof.*

I might have enlarged on the Character of the Scorner, but considering how shocking it is, and how apt to raise disagreeable Ideas in our Minds, perhaps I have already said too much; but enough to be sure to prepare you for the Reasons I am going in the next Place to offer, Why the

Scorner so generally incurs a publick *Odium*, and renders himself *an Abomination to Men*.

2. But here I shall not insist on every Distinction of the Scorners Character which I have mention'd, to shew the Reasons why his Principles and Conduct give so general a Disgust and Offence; but shall confine my self to these Three Particulars.

1. His Common Swearing.

2. His Prophaneness.

3. His confounding the Distinction of Virtue and Vice.

1. The Scorners gives a very great and general Offence by his Common Swearing; for a Man to take the Name of God, on every little Occasion in vain, is to give just Cause of Suspicion, that either he would be thought not to believe in God, or at least, that he has very false and unworthy Notions of the Divine Nature and Attributes. For the true Idea of God includes in it every thing that may give us awful and sublime, and reverential Thoughts of him; it represents him to our Minds as the greatest and best, the wisest and most perfect, and upon all these Accounts, the most aimable of Beings; who gave Being to all Things besides, and by the Word of his Power sustains them continually in Being; who fills Heaven and Earth with his Majesty; but whose Glory, in the more resplendent and immediate Manifestations of it, is above the Heavens; there he dwells in everlasting Light, surrounded with an innumerable Company of Angels and glorious Spirits, whose blessed Employment it is to admire and adore, to praise him, and to magnify him for ever.

But

But alas! how is it possible for us finite Creatures, and separated still at a greater Distance from him by our Sins, to think or speak of God in a manner worthy of him? The nearer we endeavour to approach him, the more we are dazzled and oppress'd with the Splendor of his infinite perfections, and appear the less able either to conceive them, or to express our Conceptions of them. Yet we seek so much of his eternal Power and Godhead, by the Things that he has made, and the natural Light of our Minds, as is sufficient to strike us with the most profound Awe and Veneration for him, and make us fear, as he himself describes it, *this glorious and fearful Name*, Deut. xxviii. 58.

How then can we suppose, when we see the Name of the most High God treated with the last and lowest Degree of Contempt? How can we, I say, suppose any Person that affronts God after so insolent a Manner, to have any true or becoming Notions of his Attributes? he may indeed in general believe the Existence of a Being we call God; but then he does not believe in this Being *as God*; he does not, he cannot consider him as a Being of infinite Power and Knowledge, and Justice, and in whose Hands that very Breath, *wherewith he blasphemeth*, is, Dan. v. 24. 'Tis impossible that any Person, who has these Sentiments of the Great God, should take his Holy and Reverend Name so frequently and so familiarly in vain, as some Persons are observ'd to do; and yet without these Sentiments of the Divine Attributes, the God such Men pretend to worship, if ever they do perform any Acts of Religious Worship, is no  
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God, but an Idol and Phantom of their own Imagination.

'Tis no wonder then, that those who are concern'd for the Honour of God and of his glorious Attributes, should be in the most sensible Manner offended at a Practice, which strikes so directly both at his Honour and his Attributes, and by a necessary Consequence at his very Being.

And therefore setting aside the Impiety of this Sin of customary or vain Swearing, 'tis one of the greatest Indecencies that can be committed in Conversation, especially in the Presence of those who pretend to a Sense of Piety and Religion, or who bear the sacred Character. If, in Proportion to the Esteem we have for any Person, or our Relation to him, we think our selves affronted by any Indignity offer'd him; How much higher must the Affront needs rise, and one would imagine our Resentments with it, when the eternal God, *whose we are, and whom we serve*, is openly contemn'd or dishonour'd?

But to do the World Justice, as bad as it is, this Vice is not observ'd to be so general, especially among Persons of a polite and genteel Education as formerly. Indeed the least Regard to Civility, and the common Measures of Respect in Conversation, cannot but lay very powerful Restraints upon all Sorts of Persons from it. And perhaps the best Method we can take, at least the most likely to prevail with the Scorn-er, in order to reclaim him from idle and customary Swearing, is to shew him how contrary it is to all the Rules of Decency and good Breeding; to tell him of the great Impiety and Sinfulness of such a Habit, may probably tend

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to confirm him the more in it, instead of having any good Effect upon him. For there, being no other Reason to be given for common Swearing but *because 'tis a Sin*; the more we expose the Sinfulness of it, the more we fortify the Scorners in his Reasons, such as they are for it. We must therefore take another way with him; and if it were possible to urge it, no Argument would be so effectual to cure him of this Sin, as to shew him that 'tis no Sin. But since that is altogether impossible, and seeing the Desire of most People is to please and render themselves agreeable in Conversation, the only Argument against vain Swearing, which we can make use of to the Scorners with any Success, seems to be this: That 'tis a Vice, which not only renders him highly disagreeable to all those he converses more intimately with; but in general, *an Abomination to Men.*

2. The Scorners renders himself as generally offensive by his Prophaneness; that is, by a ludicrous or contemptuous Usage of such Things and Persons, as are more immediately related to God.

Among Things, which bear this sacred and divine Relation, I shall only mention, at present, the Holy Scriptures. These the Scorners, as was intimated before, reads not with a Design to inform himself in the Principles of reveal'd Religion, or to get a more clear and distinct Notion of his Duty, but only to find Matter of Cavil or Dispute either against their Authority, or in Favour of his Sins, or else to furnish himself with a Set of Phrases and Expressions out of these Holy Records; which to shew his Contempt of them, he may apply at every turn, as he sees oc-

caſion, to the moſt common and trifling Affairs.

Yet it muſt be obſerv'd, that of Scorers, who make a prophane Uſe of the Holy Scriptures, there are two Sorts: Of the former Sort are your *Atheiſts* and *Deiſts*, your Scorers by *Profeſſion*, who deny there is any ſuch thing as a Divine Revelation, or any Reason for making it; and therefore, 'tis no wonder they ſhould endeavour to decry, and as far as they are able, to expoſe thoſe ſacred Writings, which we believe and aſſert to be divinely Reveal'd.

But, what is really Matter of Wonder and Aſtoniſhment, there are Scorers that treat the Holy Scriptures after a moſt idle and irreverent Manner, who yet are not quite gone into the Interests of Infidelity; nay, who live in the Communion of our moſt excellent Church, frequent its Worſhip, and partake of its Sacraments. Strange and unaccountable Stupidity! that Men ſhould imagine there can be any Senſe or Ingenuity in trifling with what they account the moſt ſerious things in the World, and making the moſt ſacred their Scorn and Diſverſion; 'tis more decent at leaſt for the *Deiſt* to diſpute the Authority of the Holy Scriptures, than for a Man who pretends he believes them, to treat them with ſo little Regard, or rather, indeed, with ſo open Contempt.

Now all Perſons, that conſider the Holy Scripture as they ought to do, not as the *Word of Men*, but as it is in Truth the *Word of God*; and look upon it as the Great Charter, whereby God has convey'd ſo many invaluable Privileges and Benefits to Mankind: Such Perſons, I ſay, cannot but find themſelves ſtrongly inclin'd to

express their Resentments against those, who make it their Business to condemn or ridicule, what they are so highly interested in, and have so many Obligations to stand up for the Honour of.

2. The Scorners give Offence, as by his Contempt of things, so also of Persons more immediately related to God, or set apart for his Service; for though it must be acknowledg'd, there is not usually so great or so general a Regard had to Persons of the sacred Character, which might be expected from the Nature and Dignity of it: And that even those, who own the Divine Mission and Authority of the Ministers of Christ, do not always treat them with a due Deference, yet they cannot for this Reason, but carry with some decent Respect at least towards them.

Whatever personal Distast or Prejudice Men may have taken against some particular Clergymen, yet they are sensible for the most Part, that in Proportion as the Ministers of Religion are had in Honour or Contempt, Religion it self will rise or fall in common Estimation.

And therefore the Enemies of Christianity in particular, who do not think it convenient all at once to declare open War against it, take a probable Method enough to dispose Men for those ill Principles which lie at the bottom of their Designs, by endeavouring to destroy the *Rights*, and by a natural Consequence the Reputation of the *Clergy*.

But thank God, how much soever we lament the Decay of Christian Piety, yet we have this Argument *in Fact*, of the general Power and Influence of the Christian Religion over the



Minds of Men ; that all Attempts of this Kind, tho' they may at first, by a bold Shew of Reasoning, impose upon weak Minds, yet by degrees they incur not only a publick Contempt but Abhorrence ; and the Authors of them commonly live to experience very plentifully, the Truth of what *Solomon* here observes, *That the Scorn*er is an Abomination to Men.

Yet to do them Right, there are some who deny the Ministers of the Gospel to be a distinct Order of God's Appointment, and who make them entirely Creatures of the People, in whose Hands they think all Power in Heaven and Earth should be lodg'd. There are some, I say, of these very Men, who will own that they, whose proper Office it is to minister in the Worship of God, and to pass between him, and their Principals the People ; yet ought to be had in some kind of Estimation, *for their Works sake.*

So that in Truth, the Scorn

er by his Contempt of Persons invested with a sacred Character, not only gives Offence to those who build upon the Foundation Jesus Christ has laid for the better Order and Government of his Church, but even to some of those, who professedly endeavour to undermine it.

3. The Scorn

er falls under a general Odium, by endeavouring to confound the Distinction of Virtue and Vice ; or at least by maintaining, that there is no difference between them but what arises from Common or Statute-Law, what is founded either in general Custom, or the positive Will of the Civil Magistrate.

But that we may not condemn the Scorn

er, in so important an Article, without Reason : Before we proceed any further, it may not be improper

proper for me to shew by the way, that the Distinction of Virtue and Vice is really and unalterably founded in the Nature of the Things themselves.

I will only suppose here what I have done all along, that the Scorners is no *Atheist*; but believes in general that there is a God. And tho' 'tis confess'd, he does not always actually think of God as he ought, or in a Manner worthy of his Attributes, yet by a very little Reflection (whenever we can bring him to it) he will, he must own, that all possible Perfection is included in the Idea of God.

Here I take it, we have a clear and solid Foundation for the immutable Distinction of Moral Good and Evil. Whatever brings us nearer to a Resemblance of the most perfect Being, is a Moral Good; Good, because it visibly and directly tends to the Perfection of our own Nature: And a Moral Good, because it proceeds from a right Use of our Liberty. This being the great Difference between a Natural and a Moral Action; that the one is done by certain Mechanical Laws or Powers of Motion: The other, by a free Determination of the Will. On the contrary, whatever tends to separate us at a greater Distance from the most perfect Being is a Moral Evil: Evil, because it renders us less perfect, and, for the same Reason less happy; and a Moral Evil, because 'tis an Act of our own free Choice and Consent. So that the same Arguments which prove the Distinction of Moral Good, will by Parity of Reason, prove the Distinction of Moral Evil: All this seems very plain; let us see what Use can be made of it.

Supposing

Supposing then, what cannot be disputed, that the most perfect Being, on whom all other Beings depend, is the Rule and Measure of their several Perfections; and it being no less evident that the nearer they approach this Divine Original, the more perfect they are: Our Business is to enquire whether there be any Perfections in the Idea we have of God, wherein we may be in the least capable of imitating or resembling him.

When we consider the Nature of God, and carry our Thoughts never so little forward, these imitable Perfections of it, among others, naturally present themselves to our Minds. His Goodness and Mercy, his Veracity and Justice; that these Attributes of God are Perfections, evidently appears from hence, that the Want of them would argue great Imperfection, and can only proceed from it. And that these Perfections are in some Measure and Degree at least imitable by us, is what we are all conscious of. So far then as we are beneficent and merciful, faithful and just in all our Designs and Actions, so far we are made ('tis the Apostle's Expression) Partakers of the Divine Nature, and, in the same Proportion, advance the Perfection of our own. And shall I set my self formally to demonstrate, that the Desire of being as excellent and perfect, as a good Use of our Faculties can make us, is really good and reasonable in its self? 'Twould be an Affront to the Reason and Ingenuity of the Scorners themselves to do that.

There can be nothing more evident, than that there is a Moral Goodness in the Imitation of all those imitable Attributes and Perfections, which we find in the Idea of the most perfect Being:

Being : But what shall we say then as to those Moral Virtues of Sobriety, Chastity, and Humility, which are properly Human, and which cannot be ascrib'd to a Being of infinite Perfection ? How shall we argue from the Idea of God, that those Things are morally Good, which are not included in his Idea ?

Directly we cannot, that's certain ; but I answer, that to be sober and chaste, and humble, is highly agreeable to our present State and Condition. And tho' we do not find in the Idea of the most perfect Being, and for that very Reason any Attributes directly corresponding to these Duties ; yet the general Reason for the Morality of them still holds good. We ought to render our selves as perfect, and to that End approach as near to God as possible. These Duties are proper Means of perfecting our Natures, and bringing us nearer to God : Therefore they must be suppos'd to have an intrinsic, which is what we understand by a Moral Goodness in them.

Were we not to ascribe a real Merit in the sober Sense of the Word, to some Actions more than others, there can be no Reason given why God should so frequently, in the Holy Scriptures, prefer certain Actions to the Obedience we owe to his positive Commands ; and yet, we are expressly told, that *to Obey is better than Sacrifice*. Sacrifice was of God's Appointment ; and therefore to perform it was a true and proper Instance of Obedience. So that to Obey, being set in direct Opposition to Sacrifice, must necessarily refer to such Instances of Obedience, as were acceptable to God upon some other account than merely because they were commanded ; such as must be suppos'd to have a natural Propriety



priety in them to recommend Men to the Favour of God, antecedent to his reveal'd Will.

What Reason, I say, can we imagine for this Preference, which God so remarkably gives in Favour of Moral Duties; but that there is in the very Nature of them some Resemblance or nearer Approach to the eternal Excellencies and Perfections of his own Nature. To those then that are willing to submit to the Authority of the Holy Scriptures, there can be no Dispute concerning the Distinction of Moral Good and Evil; 'tis, to mention no more of the numerous Passages to this Purpose, fully establish'd in the First Chapter of *Isaiah*, and in a noble Strain of Eloquence peculiar to that Prophet. But, because the Scorners will perhaps dispute the Authority of the Holy Scriptures, I have chosen rather to resolve the Morality of our Actions into the natural Reason of the Thing it self.

I am sensible 'tis an Argument which has been commonly made use of to prove, that the Moral Virtues, as we call them, have an intrinsick Rectitude and Goodness in them, not only as they tend to the Improvement and Perfection of our Minds; but as they are subservient in procuring for us all those temporal Goods and Conveniences which are proper for our present State in the Body. This Argument, in the main, is very true. 'Tis certainly more for a Man's present Interest, generally speaking, to govern himself by the Rules of Morality, than by those which favour Vice and Corruption: But, in a great many particular Cases, this Order is inverted, and Men daily transgress the Laws of Moral Virtue, without any visible Consequences in prejudice of their temporal Concerns.

For

For Instance, it tends very much to the Preservation of a Man's Health, and his good Esteem in the World, to lead a regular and sober Life; but how often does it happen that a Man falls into Company where hard Drinking is far from being thought a Reproach. And where any Person has contracted a Habit of this Vice, it may rather, perhaps, be an injury to his Health to break it off all at once. So that if this be the only Reason which makes Intemperance a Moral Evil, that 'tis prejudicial to a Man's Health or Reputation, it cannot be a Moral Evil to him under such Circumstances, wherein neither his Health nor Reputation are affected by it. The general Reason which makes it a Breach of the Moral Law, ceases in this particular Case.

Thus 'tis with respect to all the other Duties of Morality, we shall generally find our Account, with respect to our Ease and Reputation and Interest, in the Practice of them; yet we sometimes see Men raising themselves to the highest Posts of Profit and Honour, by a Conduct directly opposite to them. So that I'm afraid the Distinction of Moral Virtue cannot be made clearly out from the natural Consequences of it to promote our present Interests. We must seek for some other Rule which may universally, and in all Cases, oblige us to act as becomes Moral Agents; and that I conceive the Rule I have laid down will do.

I grant there is another Rule of universal Extent and Obligation, with respect to the Civil Duties and Offices we owe to one another. 'Tis this: That we should always do, as we would be done by, in a suppos'd Change of Circumstances;

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stances; nothing can be, or appear more reasonable, upon the first View, to every Man. And it must certainly be good and necessary, in the natural Order of Things, for *rational* Creatures to follow Reason: If a Man, says he does not see the Obligation of this Rule, there can be no Reasoning with him; because 'tis impossible to produce a Reason more clear or evident than the Rule it self. This is a good Foundation to establish the Morality of all the Duties we owe to our Neighbour upon; but I chose rather to insist upon the former Rule, as being more comprehensive, and taking in, by a due Application of it, all the Duties we owe to God, to our selves, and to one another.

Having premis'd this: I return to shew, why the Scorners, by endeavouring to destroy the Distinction I have been contending for, generally renders himself so odious.

There is nothing which gives us a greater Distaste, or raises our Hearts more against another Person, than when he either visibly affronts us, or strikes at our Interests in those things which are the most dear and important to us.

I have shewn under the former Head, how much the Scorners, by his Prophaneness and Contempt of every thing that is Sacred, affronts all the sober Part of Mankind, that have any Conversation with him, or Knowledge of him. I shall now observe to you, that by confounding the Distinction of Good and Evil, he saps the Foundation of all their Peace and Happiness in this World. Only give me leave to take notice by the By, that the Scorners is in both these Respects as great, if not a greater Abomination to Men than a downwright *Epicurean*. For tho'

*Epicurus*

*Epicurus* deny'd that the Gods interpos'd in the Affairs of the World, supposing it inconsistent with their Happiness, that they should concern themselves about any thing which might give the least Disturbance to the profound Ease and Repose wherein they liv'd, especially about Matters so far below them, as those of this sublunary World; yet this Philosopher, notwithstanding, taught his Disciples and Followers, that they should think and speak of the Gods with Reverence. So likewise, tho' he did not believe there was any future Account to be given of the Actions of Men, or, in Consequence of it, any State of Reward or Punishment after this Life; yet, he suppos'd, there was something, at least, of a natural Agreeableness and Decorum in those Actions we call virtuous, and of a natural Turpitude and Indecency on the other Hand, in such as are commonly reputed vicious. Whereas the Scorners determines as he acts, in favour of a vicious, rather than a virtuous Course of Life; makes it his Business to put Temperance, Sobriety and Chastity, out of Countenance, and places the greatest Glory as well as Happiness of Human Life, in running into all manner of Disorder and Excess.

But then, I say, thus to invert the Order of Moral Virtue and Vice, directly tends to destroy the Peace and Happiness of Mankind, whether we consider them in a private or a publick Capacity. For,

1. If there be no tie upon Conscience, how many Opportunities have Men of doing ill Things, notwithstanding the Authority of Human Laws; how many Arts are there of indirect and unjust Gain; of Lying and Detraction;  
on;

on; of Cheating and Oppression; which may be practis'd not only with Impunity, but without any scandalous Imputation: Nay, there are Men who value themselves upon their Success in such villanous Practices, and think that other People ought to do so too. So that a Conduct, really in it self infamous, sometimes tends to render a Man more considerable in the Eye of the World, tho' more generally indeed in his own. 'Tis certain, that Pride and Envy, Covetousness and Ingratitude, are the secret Springs of almost all the Contempt and Injury which are done to other Men; and yet as to these, and innumerable other Vices, Human Laws leave every Man to be a Law unto himself, and permit him to do that which is right in his own Eyes.

Men may be guilty of very criminal Practices which Human Laws take no Cognizance of; but this is not all, the Eyes of the Civil Magistrate are not in every Place beholding the Evil and the Good. Men are often guilty of high Crimes, which render them obnoxious to the Laws without being discovered; or, if they be in a great Measure detected, something may be still wanting in the Forms of a Legal Proof, of what they are charg'd with; or, if the Fact be prov'd upon them, 'tis not always impossible to evade the Sentence, or at least the Execution of it.

2. Most of these Considerations tend to shew, what an ill State Society in general would be in, were it lawful for Men to do whatever they can do, without being detected, or with Impunity if they be; for the Publick is made up of particular Persons, and what Wounds even the more distant

distant and ignoble Parts of it, cannot but in some measure at least affect the whole Body. But what above all threatens the Ruin and Dissolution of the Body Politick, is, that the superior and more noble Members of it are sometimes very dangerously corrupted, without any sure Provision of a Legal Remedy; or where such a Remedy is provided, 'tis not always perhaps convenient to apply it; or those, in whose Hands the Application lies, may be of too tender and compassionate a Temper, or possibly be prevail'd upon by that powerful Argument, which is apt to soften the hardest Hearts, and the most inveterate Resentments.

'Tis in vain here to pretend the Phantom of Honour to supply the Defects of Human Laws, and Moral Virtue, with regard to the common Good and Happiness of Society: For indeed to a Scorner, who denies there is any intrinsic Goodness in Moral Virtue, or Evil in Sin, and will have the Distinction between them to be purely Arbitrary and Nominal, to such a Man, I say, there can be no such thing as Honour; 'tis a Phantom without a Figure, and the most Chimerical one that was ever imagin'd.

Honour is a very good Word, and sounds well; but what can the Scorner, who makes a Jest of Moral Virtue, and of all the Motives proper to render Men virtuous, mean by it? Nothing certainly but Humour, or at most a decent Compliance with what is generally esteem'd by Mankind commendable and praise-worthy. But then this Reason can oblige the Scorner to a Conduct that is reputed Honourable, no longer than he can upon some private Views engage in



the most dishonourable Designs, without being found out. If the Notion of Honour consist only in an external Regard to the common Sentiments of Mankind; the Scorners, I grant is oblig'd in Point of Honour, to keep the Secret of his Friend, where the Discovery of it would turn to his Disgrace; but where he can betray his Friend, without betraying his own Baseness and Infidelity to the World, there the Laws of Honour, according to his Notion of it, can lay no further Restraints upon him.

Yet, I will grant, there are some Persons of very loose Principles, who will suffer much rather than be found false to their Friends, or their Engagements, tho' they could propose great Advantages to themselves by the Treachery; and without any Hazard of their Reputation; but then, I say, the *Constancy* of such Persons is not Honour but Mechanism: 'Tis a higher, or, if you please to have it so, a happier Fermentation of the Blood, owing for the most Part to a generous Birth or Education; but it can no more be called Honour in a Scorners, upon a true Principle, than his Fighting can be call'd true Courage.

'Tis certain, a natural Firmness or Generosity of Mind, will carry a Man a great way in all the Appearances of Honour; but 'tis not to be rely'd on in Extremities. Nothing under Circumstances of strong and violent Temptations can secure the Probity or Innocence of Men, but a due Regard to the Laws of Moral Virtue, especially, if we take in the Sanction, which God himself has in his reveal'd Will given to them.

Honour

# SERMON V. 115

Honour therefore, in the Mouth of any Person who laughs at the Distinction of Moral Virtue, must be put to the Account of a great many other good Words, which are very common in the World, and in all manner of Conversation; tho', without any proper or determinate Sense, ordinarily annexed to them. Among these confused and equivocal Terms which yet have occasion'd much Disturbance, and sometimes wonderful Revolutions in the World, none has been less understood, or more wretchedly abused, than that of Conscience; which is the more to be admir'd, because all Men but the Scorners pretend to it; and therefore, that he may not appear altogether unfit to live in the World, he has in the room of it substituted that fantastick Notion of Honour, which I have taken upon me to explode.

Upon all which Considerations, I cannot but think there is this peculiar to a Society of Scorers, if there be any such, above all other Fraternities in the World, that they are not only an Abomination to the rest of Mankind in general, but even to one another; because they are conscious to themselves, there can, upon their own Principle, be no mutual Tie of Trust, of Confidence, or Honour, to bind them safe, and engage them faithfully to one another's Interests.

Thus having finish'd what I propos'd to speak to in relation to the Character of the Scorer, and the Reasons of his being an Abomination to Men: I proceed,

3. In the Third and Last Place, to make some useful Improvements from what has been said.

And, *First*, I would observe to you, that tho' Men do not practice Religion themselves, yet the Awe of it upon their Minds is generally so great, that they cannot but entertain a secret Esteem and Veneration for it. The Natural Light of their own Reason discovers to them, *that the Law is holy, and the Commandment holy, and just, and good*, Rom. vii. 12. This fills them with a just Indignation and Resentment against vicious Persons, especially, when in their Works they deny, or in their Words openly defy the Living God; and not only please, but pride themselves in a dissolute and irreligious Course of Life.

Let us therefore endeavour to stifle the Power of Self-Love, to silence the Senses, Imagination and Passions, and judge of Things by the pure Light of our Minds, and the Motions of a clean Heart; and then the same Reason upon which we conceive so just an Abhorrence at the Vices of other Men, and in particular of the Scorners, will teach us to correct and reform our own.

For tho' 'tis true, the Scorners strike more immediately at the Honour of God, and the Interests of Religion, and lays his Axe as it were to the Root of the Tree, and upon this Account renders himself more generally an Abomination to Men; yet we must know, every Sin we are guilty of, renders us an Abomination to God, and, in one degree or other, more or less tends to his Dishonour, and the Discredit of Religion.

2. If

# S E R M O N IV. 117

2. If the Scorners be so great an Abomination to Men, let us take care to keep at as far a Distance as possible from every thing that may lead to the same prophane Temper and Disposition of Mind; For 'tis not all of a sudden that a Man can efface the Impressions of Religion, and declare open War against Heaven; he must pass through several Stages and Degrees of Sin and Prophaneness, before he can run so great a Length. But, since God, in his Just Judgment, often suffers Men to be betray'd by one Sin into another, the only effectual Method any Person can take to prevent his falling into an utter Disregard and Contempt of Religion, is never to give way in the least to any loose Principles or corrupt Practices; this, I say, is the great Security a Man can have, that he shall be able to preserve his Mind from the most dangerous Errors, and his Heart from the most gross and abominable Sins.

Let us then, in the First Place, never think or speak of God but with the highest Admiration, and most profound Expressions of Reverence; let us endeavour to enrich our Minds with a Stock of religious and devout Notions; let us often reflect on the great Things God has done for our Souls, and frequently entertain our Thoughts with the Reasonableness of Christianity, and all the wise Methods it prescribes in order to our everlasting Salvation. But then,

Let us consider, in the next Place, that how great soever our Sentiments are of the Nature and Attributes of God, or of the Beauty and Excellency of our Holy Religion, yet if we in



## 118 SERMON IV.

any wise obstruct that Influence they naturally have on our Hearts, and the Regulation of our Lives, they will be so far from being an Advantage to us, that they will serve only to strengthen the Conviction of Sin, and inflame them to a greater Height.

These Considerations, if we follow the Bent and Tendency of them, will not only preserve us from falling into the Abominations of the Scorners, to the Dishonour of God and Religion, and the Disquiet of our own Minds; but they will on the other Hand highly tend to our Improvement in all good Principles, and Christian Graces, and also, by the Blessing of God, make us further instrumental in converting others from the Evil of their Ways, and bringing them to the Acknowledgement of the Truth, that they may be saved.

And indeed there is so much Charity due to the Scorners themselves, as to hope, that tho' his Condition be very dangerous, yet upon his Repentance, 'tis not altogether desperate. God is merciful to those who have long abus'd the Riches of his Goodness and Forbearance; he willeth that all Men, how great or numerous soever their Sins have been, *should be saved*; provided, that with a true penitent Heart and lively Faith, they turn unto him. And therefore,

3. In the Conclusion of the whole Matter, as a proper Motive to the Repentance of the Scorners, I would desire him to consider, that when *Solomon* here represents him as an Abomination to Men, the Words are not to be understood as

expressing his whole or greatest Punishment; but as implying that he is also an Object of the Divine Wrath and Displeasure. And, in truth the great Reason why the Scorners renders himself so odious to Men, is, that he so insolently despises the Power, and provokes the Justice of an Almighty and Avenging God: And therefore, as much as in him lies, would make the World believe, tho' contrary to his own Belief, either that there is no God at all, or no God that judgeth in the Earth.

Yet I grant this Argument of *Solomon*, tho' it really imported no more than that the Scorners is generally abominable in the Eyes of Men, may be very proper to bring him to a Sense of his Folly, if not of his Sin. For there is scarce any Man but desires to render himself in some measure at least amiable, and to have a common Share in the Esteem and Affections of other People. Tho' it must be own'd the Scorners, of all Men living, takes the most improper Method to this End; and therefore, I say, 'twas a very wise Design in *Solomon* to attack him in that part where some Impression might most probably be made upon him. The Scorners is an Abomination to Men; But shall he escape so? No: That God whom he now blasphemes, and against whom he exalts himself, shall one Day vindicate his Honour, and the Authority of his Laws, and make the Scorners feel the Effects of that Almighty Power, and Avenging Justice, which he now pretends to despise.

Then, but *then* it will be too late, the Scorners will say of his prophane Mirth and Laughter, that it was Madness: Then he will by a dear-

bought but fruitless Experience, be made sensible of the Truth of what *Solomon* asserts in another Place, That *Judgments are prepar'd for Scorners, and Stripes for the Back of Fools*, Prov. xix. 29.

God grant, that these Considerations may be of some Use to reclaim the Scorners from the Error and Evil of his Ways, while he has yet time to repent; and consider the Things which belong unto his Peace, before they be hid from his Eyes.

SER-

# SERMON VI.

Of Evil Speaking, and the Proper Means to prevent it.

PSALM xxxix. 1.

*I said I will take heed to my Ways, that I sin not with my Tongue.*

**H**OLY David, in the foregoing Psalm, among other Effects of their Malice, complains of the unjust Calumnies and Imputations, wherewith his Enemies had endeavour'd to load him; *They that seek after my Hurt, speak mischievous things, and imagine Deceit all the Day long, ver. 12.* These base and dishonourable Methods to blacken him, were so artfully manag'd, as to render him suspected to those, who had distinguish'd themselves by many Expressions of their Esteem and Friendship for him, and even to those, with whom he was nearly ally'd; *My Lovers and Friends stand aloof from my Sore, and my Kinsmen stand afar off, ver. 11.*

It might have been expected, that upon this ill Usage, holy David would have express'd his Resent-



Resentments, and taken some proper Method to clear himself, and wipe off the Odium that had been thrown so *liberally* upon him: 'Tis ordinary, for Men under the like Provocations to discover their *Concern*, and even to think, *they do well to be Angry*.

Yet our Royal Psalmist is so far from flying out into any Heat or Transport of Passion at the Sense of the Injuries done him, tho' they were such as affected him in the most sensible and tender Part, that he at once expresses a generous Contempt of the scandalous Reports his Enemies had spread of him, and of the Credulity, which had so easily imposed on his Friends; if those may be call'd so, who rashly take up Prejudices against the Person they pretend a Regard to, either upon common and suspicious, and perhaps very chimerical Reports, or upon more sly and under-hand Insinuations. Holy *David*, I say, under these Circumstances, thought it became him rather to despise the vile and slanderous Aspersions, whereby he had been so much abus'd, than set himself seriously to confute them; *As a deaf Man he heard not, and was as a dumb Man that openeth not his Mouth.*

But as all the Dispensations of Providence lead one way or other, if we do but observe the Tendency of them, to our spiritual Advantage: So this excellent Person wisely improves the Designs of his Enemies to a very good and useful End, the Regulation of his own Conduct. The Folly and Impiety of *Evil Speaking* being so visible in them, he thereby takes occasion to form a settled Resolution against it, and proposes to himself a very wise and excellent Method, in order to effect what he had so well resolv'd;

*I said*

*I said, I will take heed to my Ways, that I Sin not with my Tongue.*

In discoursing therefore upon the Words, I shall observe this natural and easy Method.

I. I shall consider the Reasonableness of this Resolution, and particularly with respect to us, as Christians, not to offend with the Tongue.

II. The proper Method of making this Resolution Good, and that is, by taking heed to our Ways.

III. And Lastly, I shall make some useful Improvements from the Whole, and so conclude.

First, I am to consider the Reasonableness of this Resolution, and particularly with respect to us, as Christians, not to offend with the Tongue. There are several other Vices, and those too highly offensive, both to God and Man, which the Tongue is the great Instrument of; but that reigning Vice of the Tongue, which the Connection of the Words of my Text leads me particularly to consider, is Calumny, or Evil-Speaking, as it affects the Reputation and Honour of other Persons.

Now the Reasonableness of resolving and guarding, with all the Caution imaginable, against this Crime, will appear from the Three following Considerations.

First, From the great Scandal it brings upon Religion in general.

Secondly, The Injustice of it, with respect to others: And,

Thirdly, The Imprudence of it with respect to our selves,

I. This

1. This Crime of Evil-Speaking brings a great Scandal upon our Holy Religion, as it is so directly opposite to the Genius and Spirit of it, to the many express Precepts which occur in it, and that Goodness and Candour of Temper which so remarkably discover'd it self in our Blest Saviour. A Practice which tends to shew that Christians have no Regard to any of these Considerations, and that they make no Conscience of acting in direct Opposition to them, cannot be much for the Honour of Christianity, or a proper Method to remove the Prejudices of Men against it.

On the other Hand, the Truth of Christianity being so well establish'd, and the Proofs of it set in so clear a Light, by a great Number of late and excellent Tracts, publish'd to prevent the Growth of Infidelity: 'Tis to be fear'd that the main Reason which keeps Infidels from opening their Eyes to the Light of Truth, is this, that they see the Principles of Christianity have little or no Effect upon the Conduct or Practice of so great a Number of Christians; but that they live so, as to render their own Belief of those Principles to be *much* suspected. 'Tis true, this is an Objection of no Force to those, as I shall shew on another Occasion, who are willing to examine it: But this is not the Way of Unbelievers, and the Enemies of reveal'd Religion; their Business is not Reason but to ridicule: And therefore instead of such Arguments as might be expected from those who pretend to overthrow the Grounds of reveal'd Religion, they take up with such popular Prejudices as may be most likely to bring an Odium and Disgrace upon it; such as may afford them Matter  
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for prophane Wit and Raillery, to which weak Minds are many times more easily brought to submit, than to just and solid Reasoning.

Now there is nothing affords your Free-Thinkers, as these Unbelievers call themselves, so copious a Subject for Satyr; nothing wherein they so much Triumph and shew their Airs, as when they object to us the ill Lives and Manners of Christians. 'Tis granted, the generality of those who profess Christianity, are obnoxious enough upon many other Accounts; yet of all the Vices which reign among Christians, there is none perhaps more common, none which does more visibly justify the Charge of Corruption against them, than this I am attacking; this spreading, this flagrant, I had almost said, this fashionable Vice of Evil-Speaking. But let us consider,

In the First Place, how contrary it is to the Genius and Spirit of Christianity, which discovers it self in nothing more than in disposing those, who are influenc'd by it, to do all the Good they possibly can to all Men, and to put the most candid and favourable Constructions upon their Designs or Actions. This Disposition is no other than what the Holy Scriptures call Charity; and which, so far as it relates to the Duties of the Second Table, is the very Soul of Religion, the *Mother-Virtue*, which diffuses through the several Branches of it, and gives Life and Vigour to them. And therefore our Saviour reduces half of the Law, to this one Duty of Charity, as that wherein all the other Duties we owe to our Neighbour, are virtually imply'd, and whereby they ought to be regulated.

Among



Among other beautiful Descriptions the Apostle gives of this Duty, one is, that it *thinketh no Evil*, (1 Cor. xiii. 3.) A Christian, who has any true charitable Sentiments, and such as the Religion he professes is apt to inspire, towards his Neighbour, will be so far from thinking himself at Liberty to defame him by any scandalous or reproachful Words, that he will not easily admit a *Thought* which tends to his Disadvantage or Dishonour. 'Tis in the same Sense we are to understand the Words of St. Peter, *Charity shall cover a multitude of Sins*, 1 Pet. iv. 8. That is, where Men have the true Spirit of Christianity, and love one another as they ought, they will be inclin'd, if any one happen to be overtaken with a Fault, to palliate and excuse it, and if possible, to hide it; they will make all favourable Allowances for the Frailties and Defects of human Nature, and candidly presume, that the Crime was committed through Inadvertency, through Surprise or Ignorance, or some extraordinary unhappy Circumstances of Temptation. I am sensible indeed, these Words are frequently explain'd in another Sense; as importing, that Acts of Charity and Beneficence to the Poor, are a very proper Sacrifice to induce God to pardon Sinners, and to avert the impending Judgments their Sins had provok'd him to inflict. But tho' the Words may be thus interpreted by way of Accommodation, and in a Sense agreeable to other Passages of Holy Writ, wherein such *excellent Things* are spoken of this Duty of Charity; yet I conceive, the Intention of the Apostle in this Place is to shew, that where any Person has the Share in our good Esteem and Affections, which Christianity requires

quires and supposes, we shall be so far from taking a Pleasure in reflecting upon his Miscarriages, or in hearing them reflected upon by others, that we shall be averse to believe them; or at least, with as much Decency as we can, draw a Vail over them.

So that it appears, that the Apostle St. James had great Reason to dissuade Christians from this Sin of Evil-Speaking, on the Account of the Dishonour it reflects on their Holy Religion; *Speak not evil* (says he) *one of another, Brethren; he that speaketh evil of his Brother, and judgeth his Brother, speaketh evil of the Law, i. e. of the great Law of Christian Charity; which runs, as it were, like a golden Vein, through all the Writings of our Lord and his Apostles, and ought to be the Rule of all our Thoughts, Words and Actions, in Relation to the Duties we owe to our Neighbour.* But,

2. As this Vice stands condemn'd by the Nature and Design of Christianity in general, so does it likewise by many particular, and express Passages of Holy Writ. I shall only lay before you two or three of them: I begin with that of our Blessed Saviour, *Mat. v. 22.* where having caution'd his Hearers against the crying Sin of Murder, he proceeds to shew the fatal Effects of Anger and Evil-Speaking, as having a near Affinity with it; *I say unto you, whosoever is angry with his Brother without a Cause, shall be in danger of the Judgment; and whosoever shall say to his Brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the Council; but whosoever shall say, thou Fool, shall be in danger of Hell-fire.*

The Design of our Saviour in which Words, is to shew us, that this Sin of Evil-Speaking, and

and the dangerous Effects of it, are still greater in Proportion, as we rise in our Resentment, or reproachful Language. Thus he, that is only angry at his Brother without a Cause, or upon a very slight Provocation, and may thereby be induc'd to use some general Expressions of Contempt toward him, shall be in danger of the Judgment; that is, by way of Allusion to Human Judicatures, which extend in many Cases to deprive Criminals of Life; he that entertains any such Motion of Anger or Contempt towards his Brother, shall be liable to be punish'd with the Loss of his Soul, or Life eternal. But if his Anger ferment to such a Degree, that it break out into more bitter and personal Investives, so as to represent his Neighbour as a worthless despicable Wretch, an useless insignificant Tool, which is the proper Signification of the Word *Raca*, then he shall be in danger of the Council; that is, of the Jewish *Sanhedrim*, which had Power to inflict the Punishment of Stoning; whereby our Lord intimates to us, that still a severer Punishment is due to such Offenders, than the bare loss of Life, or Extinction of Being. But he that still proceeds to more violent and virulent Expressions, so as to call his Brother a Fool, or an Idiot, as much as to say, a Person unfit for Human Society, and incapable of answering the Ends for which he was born into it; in effect, a Man only in outward Shew and Appearance, but without that Reason and Understanding, which distinguish him from a Brute: He, who uses such contumelious Language to his Brother, seems incapable of using any worse; and therefore our Saviour describes his Punishment, by one of the most exquisite Torments, which

# S E R M O N VI. 129

which Human Cruelty and Superstition ever invented, and which was practis'd in the Valley of *Hinnom*; for there the Pagans offering their Children to Devils put them in a brazen Vessel, with Fire under it, to burn them gradually to Death; and therefore this Punishment is very significantly render'd by *Hell fire*.

I have been the longer in Explaining these Words of our Saviour, both because there is some Difficulty in them, and as they tend to shew us, that even the least and lowest Degree of Calumny, shall not escape with Impunity.

No wonder then, that in all the Apostolical Writings, we are so earnestly caution'd against so dangerous and damnable a Sin. *St. Paul*, in his Epistle to the *Ephesians*, charging them not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, proceeds to enumerate some of those Sins, whereby the Holy Spirit is most apt to be griev'd, and withdraw the Influences of his Grace from us. Among these, he particularly mentions Evil-Speaking; and by reserving it for the last Place of Gradation, seems to set a Mark of Distinction upon it. *Let all Bitterness* (says he) *and Wrath, and Anger, and Clamour, and Evil-Speaking, be put away from you*, Ephes. iv. 30, 31. The Scope of his Argument is to shew us, that we cannot be supposed to have any vital Communion with the Spirit of God, while we allow our selves in a Practice so injurious and provoking to him; and indeed, so contrary to all those Sentiments of universal Love and good Will to Mankind, which 'tis his blessed Office to enlarge, and fill our Hearts with.

I shall mention but one Passage more; and that is from the First Epistle of *St. Peter*,



# 130 S E R M O N VI.

Chap. ii. 1. where we are exhorted to lay aside all *Malice, and all Guile, and Hypocrisies, and Envy, and Evil-Speakings*. Here again we find Evil-Speaking number'd among those Vices, which are most opposite to the Graces of the Christian Life, and put at the end of the Account, as if all the rest were imploy'd and included in it. But,

3. This Vice is no less opposite to that Candor and Goodness of Temper, which so remarkably discover'd it self in our Blessed Saviour. None certainly had more just Occasions, or more violent Provocations to inveigh against the prevailing Vices and Follies of Mankind; yet we never find him entertaining himself or his Disciples with Complacency on this Subject: We may say of his Exposing the Vices of ill Men, that it was his *strange Work*. He omitted many Occasions which would seem to have justify'd it; and if at any time the Honour of God, or the Interests of Religion induced him to it, 'twas not without a sensible Violence to his great Goodness, and compassionate Temper of Mind. Thus his very Reproofs of the Hypocrisy of the *Scribes and Pharisees*, are introduced with a tender Exclamation, which discovers they were not levell'd against their Persons but their Vices; and that he had a real Concern for their Recovery and Amendment, as well as the Advancement of true Piety.

The Apostle, in the same Disposition, calls the *Galatians* Foolish, and puts the Question, with some seeming Heat to them; *Who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the Truth?* Gal. iii. 1. For 'tis evident, what he aims at is not to traduce and vilify their Persons; but by a whole-  
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# S E R M O N VI. 131

some Severity of Expression to correct their Errors, and bring them to a Sense of their Follies. And to the same End is that Reproof of our Lord to his Disciples, *Luke xxiv. 25. O Fools, and slow of Heart to believe all that the Prophet have spoken!*

And here it may not be improper, to prevent any Mistakes in this Matter, to enquire in what Cases it may be lawful to divulge the Ill we hear, upon certain Grounds, or know concerning our Neighbour; and certainly, 'tis not only lawful but incumbent upon us to do it, in these three Cases particularly; *First*, Where the Honour and Interests of Religion are struck at, especially by Persons whose Example is of a spreading and dangerous Influence to corrupt or seduce others: And *Secondly*, Where the publick Safety and good of Society are concern'd, Reasons of Justice render it necessary, that we should charge Men with any ill Designs we know them engag'd in; and that, when they visibly tend to the Disturbance or Destruction of the State, we should, as far as we may be capable of doing Service thereby, expose such Designs; for how much soever we are oblig'd, by the Laws of the Gospel, to treat Sinners or Criminals in any kind with Lenity and Compassion, and to conceal their Crimes, where 'tis of no real Concernment to the Ends of Piety and Justice to discover them, yet the Good of the Publick must ever be consider'd, as superior to all private Obligations: And for this Reason, *Thirdly*, Where the Reputation or Interests of particular Men are concern'd, our Charity to the Person that does the Wrong, must give Place to the

Justice we owe to him who suffers it. And tho' this may appear Matter of private Consideration, as to the Persons immediately concern'd, yet 'tis certainly for the Preservation of publick Peace and Order, that all Persons whatever should have Justice done them; especially, in what is of so great Importance to them, as their good Name, and their Legal Rights. All these Rules are comprehended in that excellent Advice of the Son of *Syrach*; *Whether it be a Friend or a Foe, speak not of other Mens Matters, and if thou canst without Offence reveal them not*, i. e. never expose the Faults of other Men, except in such Cases where it may be of any real Prejudice to Religion, or the good of the Community, or the Rights of private Persons to conceal them.

And upon these Considerations, all candid and favourable Allowances ought to be made to Ministers in the Discharge of their Office, if they sometimes use a greater Warmth and Vehemence of Expression in attacking the prevailing Errors or Vices of the Age; even tho' their Reproofs, wherein, *however*, they ought to be very tender and decent, should be levell'd against some particular notorious Sinners, and seem to tell them openly, *You are the Men*.

We are not therefore to impute such open Rebukes to any personal Prejudice or Distaste the Minister has to the Persons affected by them, but to his Zeal in a faithful Discharge of his Duty, and an *accidental* Application of a general Rule.

In Truth, under the Regulations I have mention'd, it not only concerns us of the Ministry, but all Christians whatever, to detect and expose

pose Sinners, and bring them to Light: And tho' this cannot be done in many Cases, without pointing more immediately at Sinners of Distinction, yet, so far as the Charge is just, and exhibited with all possible Decency, we have both the Example of the meek and holy Jesus, and of his Apostles; I do not say to excuse, but to warrant and *justify* our Reproofs.

But, alas! how little are the Rules I have laid down observ'd by the generality of Christians, in the Liberties they take of censuring the Conduct of other Men; How seldom are the Interests of Religion (to confine my self to them) so much as consider'd? Let us examine our own Hearts a little, upon this Article; Is it because we have a Zeal for Religion, that we are so highly offended at the Faults and Disorders we see other People guilty of? Why then, contrary to all the Rules of Religion, do we discover so sensible a Pleasure, in exposing them, or in hearing them exposed? Or is the Reformation of the Party, who gave the Offence, the Thing that we aim at? Why then do not we take a more proper Method to reclaim him? Why do not we, as *Solomon* advises, *Debate the Cause with our Neighbour himself, without discovering the Secret to another?* Prov. xxv. 9. Or, if there be a Necessity of open Rebuke, why, instead of the Spirit of Meekness and Christian Compassion, are we observ'd to assume an Air of Contempt or Ridicule, when we set about it? If we will seriously answer our selves these Questions, I am afraid, 'twill not be found a true Zeal for Religion, or real Concern for the Good of those, whose Reputations we are so free with; but the Pleasure of gratifying some private Pique or



Passion, which makes us so forward in censuring them.

I speak this upon Supposition, that we had some real Grounds to reflect upon the Conduct of others; but where we are forc'd to *Invent* to make them guilty of unknown, or perhaps, unthought-of Crimes; where we endeavour to give a false and malicious Turn, even to their good and commendable Actions, or stretch their real Failures beyond the Measures of Truth: This is so far from all the Rules of the Christian Religion, that 'tis a Reproach to the common Principles of Humanity, and a scandalous Violation of the just and natural Rights of Mankind; but this will appear more particularly under my Second general Head.

II. The Injustice of this Crime of Evil-Speaking, with respect to others. And,

I. 'Tis in the First Place a very certain and evident Truth, that, according to the Value or Worth of any thing, wherein we invade another Man's Right, the Wrong we do him is proportionably heightned: 'Tis no less certain, that of all the external Advantages and Comforts of Human Life, there are none more valuable, or of greater Importance to a Man, than a good Name. The laudable Ambition of being well thought and spoken of, discovers it self in Persons of all Ranks and Distinctions; but Persons, whose Birth, or Fortune, or Education, sets them more conspicuously in the Eye of the World, and gives their Example a wider Scope and Influence, are concern'd, above all others, to be careful of their Reputation; and indeed, to do them right in many respects, they com-

commonly are so: There is scarce a Man to be found among them, who will not expose himself to the Danger of dying upon the Spot, rather than suffer any thing which visibly tends to his Disgrace, or the Diminution of his Honour.

I do not speak this to justify such a Method of revenging any unjust Calumny or Aspersions cast upon them, as 'tis ordinary for Gentlemen to recur to; for certainly, no Person ought to consult his Honour at the Expence of his Innocence, or by Ways dishonourable to God and Religion; neither are we in any Case to demand or seek private Satisfaction against the Authority of publick Laws. But I would only observe, that Men of any Consideration in the World, have ordinarily so great a Passion for a good Name, that upon an Affront, or Indignity offer'd them, they will postpone all other Regards to it; and that this Passion is sometimes so strong and violent, as to carry them beyond all Rules of Reason: But then, I say, such a Practice can never, without a Contradiction, be pleaded for as reasonable; which supposes, for the Time, a Disuse, or Loss of Reason, and which is only supported by a confused Noise of the Senses, Imagination, and Passions.

Indeed, this Desire, which Men have of maintaining an honourable Post in the Minds of other Persons, is not confin'd to the narrow Limits of this Life, but frequently stretches it self to Futurity: There are few who value themselves upon the Reputation of any Merit or Excellency in this Life, but are concern'd to leave a Name behind them, which may be mention'd in Terms of Honour and Respect. And for this Reason, among other Motives to a Holy

and Pious Life, Religion is represented, as entitling its Votaries after Death, to a living Monument, as it were, in the Minds and Memory of those who survive them; and therefore *Solomon*, no doubt, design'd it as a proper Argument to engage Men in the Interests of Religion, when he observ'd to them, *That the Memory of the Just is blessed*, Prov. x. 7. And holy *David* had the same good End in View, when he pronounced, *That the Righteous shall be had in everlasting Remembrance*, Psal. cxii. 6. Can there then be a higher Aggravation of Injustice, or a more notorious Violation of all the Rules of common Equity, (especially of that *Golden Rule*, of doing to others, as we would be done by, in a supposed Change of Circumstances) than to defraud any Person of what he prefers above all other temporal Enjoyments; and what, in the Opinion of the wisest of Men, is really preferable to them? Prov. xxii. 1.

2. But it ought to be further consider'd, that the Injustice of Evil Speaking commonly extends further, than the defrauding a Man of what he sets so just a Value upon, his Reputation and Honour: 'Tis for the most part highly injurious and prejudicial to him, with respect to his other Interests, and very often proves an Injury to the Publick.

The Desire which People ordinarily discover to preserve a fair Reputation in the World, is very reasonable, and serves to a great many good and useful Ends. A Man, who is well thought of and esteem'd, is in a better Capacity of managing his private Concerns with Advantage, and of being serviceable to his Country, his Family, and his Friends; the good Opinion  
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other Persons have of him, enforces his Advice, gives him a more ready and free Access in his Applications, and facilitates the Execution of all his Designs: In a word, in all the Ways of Commerce and Dealing in the World, it is of unspeakable Use and Importance to him.

It were endless to enumerate all the Advantages of a good Reputation, and to shew that there is scarce any Action of our Lives, how good soever in it self, which a good Reputation does not give a better Grace to.

So that it deserves, I say, to be very well consider'd, that the Injury we do other Persons, especially Persons of Merit, or any useful Qualifications, by endeavouring to fasten on them scandalous Imputations, does not terminate in them, but is many times a Prejudice to the Publick, and the Interests of Religion; for, as *Plutarch* well observes, the Reputation of Honour and Worth affords one a thousand Opportunities of doing Good in the World, by opening to him an easy Passage to the Hearts and Affections of Men; whereas, says he, if a Man lie under any Calumnies or Suspensions, he cannot exert his Virtues, be he never so well qualified, to the Benefit of others, without committing a kind of Violence upon them.

3. That which heightens the Injustice of this Crime the more, is, that 'tis so difficult to make the injur'd Party any Reparation. A Scandal, when it has been once let fly abroad, is not easily recall'd; but as a poisonous Vapour sometimes infects a whole City or Region; so a Calumny, once set forward, and meeting with so general an Inclination to push it on, is not only apt to spread it self wide, but the further it spreads,  
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the more it usually increases its Malignity; so that the first Author of it neither knows to how vast an Account, the Injury he has done, may swell, nor how to make any valuable Satisfaction for it, if he should: He ought indeed (which yet Offenders in this Kind are not the most forward to do) to take all the Care possible, in order to repair the Offence he has given, by making an ingenuous Confession of it to the Party offended, by asking his Pardon, and endeavouring to disabuse those he has misled into an ill Opinion of him. This is what all the Rules of Religion, of common Honesty and Ingenuity, require. But this is far short of a Compensation for the Injury which the Person abused may sustain by the Scandal; for considering the contagious Nature of it, Who knows where, or when, or at what Distance of Time it may break out afresh? Who can determine with any Certainty, what Prejudice it may do him in the Pursuit of his just and reasonable Designs with those Persons in whose Hands his Interests lie. I proceed,

*Thirdly*, In the Third and Last Place, to consider this Vice of Evil-Speaking, with respect to the Imprudence of those who are guilty of it.

And *First*, There are few Persons who give their Tongues a general Liberty of Scandal and Defamation, that do not irritate others to take the same Freedom with them. All Men have not that Command of their Temper (which we have observ'd in Holy *David*) as to be silent under Provocations of this Kind. Whatever bright Ideas we have of Religion, and the Duties of Christian Meekness in particular, yet 'tis too visible Christians do not always govern their

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Practice by Principle. What affects us in our nearest Interests, is not easily digested; and 'tis hard to persuade Men in such Cases, that Patience and Submission are Duties really incumbent on them.

God forbid! I should be thought to speak this with any Intention to justify such Retaliations or reciprocal Invectives which Persons, when they see themselves ill used, are apt to fly to. I only design to observe to you, that Christians do not always follow the Motions of Grace, and that, where they do not, Nature, deprav'd Nature, will have its Course.

Now we are not naturally very much disposed to speak advantageously of those, who endeavour to vilify or traduce us: On the other Hand, there is no Provocation at which our Hearts rise sooner, or more violently prompt us to a Revenge. So that the Slanderer does not always consult his own Reputation or Ease, but exposes himself to a Resentment, which at one time or other, the slander'd Party may be in a Condition to turn upon him, both to his Disgrace, and his Disquiet.

And therefore the *Psalmist* advises those, who would pass their Days agreeably in this World, and not involve themselves in unnecessary Feuds and Animosities, to be cautious how they provoke the Resentment of others by Calumny or Detraction, *What Man is he that desireth Life, and loveth many Days, that he may see good? Keep thy Tongue from Evil, and thy Lips from speaking Guilt. Depart from Evil and do Good: Seek Peace and pursue it, Psal. xxxiv. 12, 13, 14.* By which is imply'd, that to speak Evil of no Man is one of the most proper and prudent Methods we can take

take to cultivate a good Understanding with all Men, and to free our selves from those troublesome and uneasy Contentions which Scandal and Evil-Speaking are continually entangling People in.

Solomon, who has laid down so many excellent Rules and Instructions for the Conduct of Human Life, is very copious on this Head. *A Fool's Lips*, says he, *entereth into Contention, and his Mouth calleth for Strokes. A Fool's Mouth is his Destruction, and his Lips are the Snare of his Soul*, Prov. xviii. 6, 7. And again, *Whoso keepeth his Mouth and his Tongue, keepeth his Soul from trouble*, Prov. xxi. 23. But what need I multiply Authorities to confirm what is so very obvious, and what almost every Person can attest from his own Experience.

2. The Folly and Imprudence of this Vice of Evil-Speaking appears further from hence; that it seldom, if ever answers one great End we propose to our selves by it.

We are apt to imagine, that by lessening or throwing Dirt upon other People, we set our selves off to greater Advantage, and appear in a better Light: But we ought to consider the World has, at that very Moment, an Eye upon our own Conduct, and the same Right to make a Judgment of it, as we have to sit upon the Actions of other People. And that it will judge of us, not from our declaiming against their Vices or Defects, and the Elevation we would thereby give our selves above them; but from our personal Qualifications or Behaviour.

The very Moment, I say, we attack the Reputation of another Person, we awaken, we excite the Curiosity of those we vilify him to, to lay

lay us in the Balance, and to enquire, whether we also are not Men of *like Passions* our selves? And by what indirect Views or Motives we are acted? Upon which Enquiries, 'tis highly probable, something may be discover'd, which we should rather desire might be conceal'd.

3. Be pleased to consider further under this Head of Imprudence, That Persons, who give themselves the Liberty to reflect upon the criminal Actions and Behaviour of other People, or to charge them perhaps with Crimes they never thought of, are frequently observ'd to speak their own Inclinations, and to give some visible and plain Hints what they themselves would have been disposed to do under the same Circumstances of Temptation.

Hence it is, that Scandal is never more industriously spread, or artfully improv'd, than by Persons of defil'd Imagination, and a corrupt Heart. They who are sensible of their own Disorders, and what Enormities they are apt to run into themselves, calculate the Height of other Peoples Crimes from their own Aims; and thereby make a secret Confession, what, in a supposed Change of Persons, their own Inclinations would have prompted them to.

The *Psalmist* seems to have had the same Notion, when in Answer to one that endeavour'd to fasten a Train of unjust Imputations upon him; He replies, *Thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thy self*, Psal. l. 21. That is, thou hast form'd a Judgment of my Conduct, from the natural Bent and Disposition of thy own Heart. So scandalous are the Motives by which the  
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Slanderer is commonly acted ; and so difficult is it for him to dissemble or conceal them.

And thus having consider'd the Reasonableness of this Resolution, not to offend with the Tongue : I proceed,

*Secondly*, In the next Place, according to the Method propos'd, to consider the proper Method of making this Resolution good ; and that is, by taking heed to our Ways.

To take heed to our Ways implies in general, that we keep a strict and watchful Eye upon all our Actions, that we frequently examine and call them over, and impartially state Accounts between God and our own Consciences. Religion being the only Means that leads to our great End, the Happiness of our Souls to all Eternity ; it is very frequently and significantly in Scripture express'd by the Metaphor of a Way : So that in truth to take heed to our Ways, is, to have a due Regard to the Practice of Religion in all its Parts, and to regulate all the Motions of our Heart, as well as all the Actions of our Life by it.

But I shall consider this Expression in its more restrain'd Sense ; and wherein, I conceive, it is here more particularly to be understood, as it imports the great Duty of Self-reflection or Examination. A Duty, which if we discharge with that Care and Frequency we ought, we shall have less Time, and less Inclination to concern our selves about the Failings or Disorders of other Persons.

We shall have less Time for this criminal Amusement ; because by calling our own Ways frequently to Remembrance, we shall discover how many Opportunities of religious Improve-  
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ment we have trifled away already, or perhaps abused to very wicked and irreligious Purposes ; and that it concerns us therefore, by a more strict and constant Application to the Duties of Religion, for the future, to use our utmost Endeavours, towards redeeming the Time. We shall plainly see, in a faithful and conscientious Discharge of this Duty of Self-Examination, that Religion is not calculated for idle or loose Persons ; but that, as the Business of it is of the last Concernment to us, so 'tis not to be slubber'd carelessly over, but requires, together with great Diligence and Resolution of Mind, a constant Attendance.

He must have made great Advances in the Course of a religious Life, who, while he is taking a Survey of himself, and impartially considering what manner of Man he is, does not perceive the Propriety and Application of those or the like Reflections.

How little Conformity is there between my Knowledge and my Zeal, my Faith and my Works, my Principles and my Practices? How bright and charming is Religion in the Theory, and how cold in Comparison, and unaffecting in its Influence ; like those distant Orbs of Heaven, whose Order we admire, and whose Light we behold with Pleasure, without being sensible of their Heat? How often have I resolved to lead a more righteous and holy Life, and how soon, how easily, have my Resolutions vanish'd or come to nothing? How often have vain and idle, and even vicious Thoughts come into my Mind, where they have not only found an easy Admission, but an agreeable Entertainment? How apt are they to mingle in my Devotions,  
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## 144 S E R M O N VI.

and to turn my very Prayers into Sin? How loose and unguarded, and many times sinful, or the occasion of Sin to others, are my Words and Discourses? And how apt am I, especially upon any sudden Motion of Anger or Revenge, to speak unadvisedly with my Lips? How hard is it to be free in Conversation without discovering an Easiness or Complaisance, which is not to be examin'd by the Rules of Christian Severity? How often do my Passions carry me against the clear Light and Conviction of my Reason? And how moving is any thing that nearly affects me in my worldly, above what relates to my spiritual Concerns; as if our present State were the very Reverse of what the Apostle describes it? And the Things which are seen, were Eternal; and the Things which are not seen were Temporal.

If Men, I say, who live under a Sense of Religion, and are in some measure careful to improve their Time to the great Ends and Purposes of it, yet find themselves very much pinch'd and distress'd, when they seriously put these Questions to their own Heart; How much ought Sinners who have hitherto liv'd in a general Neglect of the Duties of Religion, and the favourable Circumstances of Grace? How much, I say, ought such Persons to use all Diligence for the time to come, in order to retrieve their former Miscarriages, and work out their own Salvation?

Indeed the wisest and best of us, when we consider these Things, will find we have so great a Work lying unfinish'd upon our Hands, and so little time, considering the necessary Affairs and Avocations of Life to do it in, that  
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it will be much more proper to put the Questions to our selves, Who is sufficient for these Things, or who can say I have made my Heart clean? Than to misemploy our Time in examining, or reflecting upon the Faults and Miscalriages of other People.

By frequently Examining into the State of our own Souls, as we shall have less Time, so we shall have less Inclination to censure the Conduct of others: By considering how apt we our selves are to be tempted, and how easily we have been overcome by Temptation. We shall be dispos'd to make a more favourable Judgment of their Failings or Escapes; we shall think it unreasonable to expect that they should be perfect, while we are conscious of so many Defects in our own Conduct; we shall be asham'd to condemn Men of like Passions, for taking those Liberties, which we think excusable in our selves.

There is, in truth, a great deal of Reason, why we should animadvert with much greater Severity upon our own Conduct, than that of other Men; because in our selves we know the Secret Springs of Action, upon what Motives and Views, and with what Temper and Disposition of Mind we act; we are sensible that our best Performances are many times sully'd and allay'd with impure Mixtures, with one By-end or other, of Vanity, Interest, or Self-Love: But in the Judgment we make of other Men's Actions, we are to proceed by another Rule. Common Ingenuity, much more Christian Charity, obliges us to suppose many favourable Circumstances, which may lessen the Guilt of them; as that they were done ignorantly or inconsiderately,



ately, or without a malicious Intention. These different Judgments, I say, which we form of any Action by the Rules of Charity, *which loveth all Things, and believeth all Things*, on the one Hand; and from what we certainly know concerning all the aggravating Circumstances of our own Crimes on the other; improve the Mote in our Brother's Eye, into a Beam in our own, and give him clearly, and in every Respect, the advantage of the Comparison; which, if we duly consider'd, it would be a Rule to us, always to think the best of other People, and the worst of our selves; and we should better comprehend the Reason of the Apostle's Advice, *That in Lowliness of Mind each should esteem other better than himself*, Phil. ii. 3. I shall now, (3.) In the Third and last Place endeavour to make some useful Improvements from what has been said, and so conclude.

And, First, If Evil Speaking be in general so heinous a Sin, and on so many Accounts injurious to the Party spoken against, the Guilt of it must still be increas'd, when such particular Persons are defam'd as bear any extraordinary Character, or whose Reputation is of greater Influence; such as Princes, and Civil Magistrates that are put in Authority under them; whose Honour it is the common Interest of Society to support and maintain, because in proportion to any Contempt or Indignity offered to their Persons, their Authority it self will grow cheap and precarious: And therefore our Laws have by due Penalties guarded Persons of Character and Distinction in the State, from all scandalous Insults in this kind; one Reason whereof, no doubt is this, that in the Discharge of  
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any great Trust, in the Conduct or Execution of any great Design; a good Reputation is of unspeakable Use and Advantage to *broW* *old*

The same Reason should oblige us to be cautious, how we speak anything to the Contempt or Dishonour of that Order of Men, whose Office it is to minister in things pertaining to God. I am sensible, 'tis thought an invidious Task in a Clergyman to assert the Dignity of his own Function, and to put People in mind of the Respect due to it. But why should that, which is permitted to all other Orders and Distinctions of Men in the World, be thought culpable in a Clergyman? For what Reason? Not from the Nature of their Office to be sure; which as 'tis most honourary in itself, so 'tis of the greatest Importance and Concernment to Mankind *broW*

This Jealousy, therefore, of the Reputation and Authority of the Priesthood; and that Complacency which Men so frequently discover, when they hear any little Stories which may tend to vilify Persons of this high Order, must proceed from a secret Prejudice against Religion itself, and a Design to bring some ill Report upon it. *to avoid to avoid to avoid*

And so far indeed Libertines are in the right; that the Success of our Ministry depends more upon the good Opinion Men have of our Persons, than of our Parts, or all other *our* Qualifications put together. Whoever, therefore, has any true Zeal or Honour for Religion, will do nothing that may tend to lessen its Ministers in that fair Character, which is so necessary at once to preserve the Esteem due to their Order, and to give Authority and Efficacy to their Doctrine. A good Man, instead of countering

or spreading any false Reports, to the Dishonour of those to whom Christ has committed the Word of Reconciliation, will think himself concern'd, *for their Words sake*, to suppress, as far as is consistent with the Rules I have mention'd, even such ill Reports of them, as are true.

2. From what has been said, we may observe the general Decay of Christian Piety. When Christianity was first preach'd in the World, and for some Ages after, the great Study of the Disciples of Christ, was, how they might edify one another by a holy and religious Conversation; and it must be granted, they took a very proper Method, both for promoting mutual Instruction, and inflaming a mutual Zeal. A Word of Advice seasonably apply'd and spoken Home to the Conscience of a Sinner in private Conversation, has sometimes had a greater Impression upon him, and staid longer with him, than many excellent Discourses from the Pulpit; and indeed, 'tis natural enough for us to distinguish between what is done in the Discharge of a general Duty, and what is done out of a particular Motive of Love or Charity to our selves.

Upon which Account the Apostle St. Paul, so frequently recommends a Conversation, which may testify the inward Sense we have for Religion, and our Zeal for promoting it in others. This is the excellent Advice he gives the *Ephesians*, Chap. iv. 25. and the Reason of it extends to all succeeding Christians; *Let no corrupt Communication come out of your Mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister Grace to the Hearers.* So again, he exhorts the *Colossians*, Chap.

Chap. iv. 6. *Let your Speech be always with Grace, seasoned with Salt; not with those satyrical Bites and Invectives, of which Conversation ordinarily relishes so much, and without which it is thought to be dull and insipid; but those wholesome and discreet Maxims of Religion, which, by the Grace of God, may tend to purify our Hearts, and give us a more lively and Affectionate Sense of our Duty.*

'T would be no difficult Matter to shew, which of these Subjects, Conversation among Christians more generally turns upon: Those who have no useful Way of employing their Time, or spend a great part of it in making, or receiving Visits, are best able to judge of what I say. 'Tis, I'm afraid, to such Persons, a much more agreeable Entertainment to expose the Sinner, than to support the Cause of Virtue, against that of Sin: The reasonable and decent Liberty of Scandal, as they would have it thought, wherein they allow themselves, does not proceed from any religious Regards or Considerations, but from a Desire of gratifying some private Vanity, or personal Resentment: In a word, even good Men often happen into Company, where they must have a becoming Assurance, not to be put out of Countenance; if, instead of such vain and sinful Amusements, they would introduce some grave and important Subject of Religion or Morality.

3. If Evil-Speaking be so heinous a Crime, let us take care not only to avoid it our selves, but to discountenance it in others. I must own, there is some Courage and Resolution requir'd to stem a Torrent, which runs so strong, and wherewith such Multitudes are carry'd away;



out the more general any sinful Practice is, 'tis an Argument of the greater Bravery and Generosity of Mind to oppose it: But if we have not Power enough over our selves to do that, let us take care, at least, that by any seeming Complacency in it, we be not thought to encourage so Unchristian a Conversation. Let us remember, that the Apostle makes it the Character of those, who are given up to a reprobate Mind, an Expression which denotes the most dreadful and dangerous State of Sinners in this World, that they not only do evil things themselves, but take pleasure in those that do them.

I do not say, that a Person who hears his Neighbour defam'd, must always be suppos'd directly to approve the Scandal, or to be pleas'd with it. For Reasons of Modesty, or a false Shame, or Respect due to their Superiors, may induce Men on such Occasions to be silent; and these Considerations, tho' they will not justify, may perhaps in some measure excuse their Silence: But where we are among our Inferiors, or Equals, or have any particular Influence upon the Party offending; there, I say, we are under Circumstances, that not only justify our Reproofs, but render them necessary; and in such Cases, not to reprove, is certainly to share in the Guilt, and render our selves Partakers of other Mens Crimes.

This is certain, that if Persons, either in Circumstances of Equality, or Superiority, would more generally discountenance this Vice of Evil Speaking, they would take the most proper and effectual Method to put a stop to it; for, according to the Observation of Solomon, Prov. xxv. 23. *As the North Wind driveth away Rain; so doth an angry Countenance a backbiting Tongue.*

4. One Word more in Relation to the Duty of taking heed to our own Ways, and I have done. After all the Means we can prescribe to cure this Vice of Evil-Speaking, this which holy *David* prescrib'd himself, is the most proper and effectual: I have shewn, that it is so; both as by a frequent and impartial Examination of our own Conduct, we shall have less Time, and less Inclination, to make our Remarks on the Conduct of others, we shall find a large Theatre of Vice and Folly enough at Home to declaim in, without going Abroad in Search of them. Let me therefore, in the Conclusion of the whole Matter, exhort you to be Constant, and very strict in taking a Review of you own Actions. This is a Duty of general Influence upon our Lives and Conversations, and what therefore the best and wisest of Men have always, among other Rules of holy Living, laid down as one of the Principal. 'Twas the very Rule holy *David* set himself, in order to a uniform and universal Obedience to the Commands of God; *I thought, says he, on my Ways, and turned my Feet unto thy Testimonies.* And no doubt but the same Method would have the same Effect upon us too, with respect to a Life of strict Piety and Religion in general; but what I would more particularly, at this Time, leave an Impression of upon your Minds, and wherewith I shall therefore conclude, is, that to take heed to our own Ways, to try and search the Ground of our Hearts, and to look well if there be any Way of Wickedness in them, is a most excellent Means to preserve us from this dangerous, tho' God knows, very common and prevailing Sin, of *Evil-Speaking.*

## SERMON VII.

The Arguments on both Sides of the  
Question concerning the Validity  
of a Death-bed Repentance.

ACTS XXVI. 20.

*That they should repent and turn to God, and  
do Works meet for Repentance.*

**A**LL Men would be happy; and in Consequence of an Inclination so natural and invincible, there are few Persons but design at least one time or other to repent and turn to God. But 'tis not so generally agreed, whether it be absolutely necessary to the Salvation of penitent Sinners, that they should *do Works* meet for Repentance; or live to discover the Effects of it in their future Reformation. For a great many are of Opinion, so they do but in their last Moments confess their Sins in a humble Manner to God, and sincerely resolve upon a new Course of Obedience, such a Resolution will recommend them to his Favour, tho' they have no Time, wherein to evidence the Sincerity of it: They maintain therefore, that when  
St. Paul,

St. Paul, in the Excellent Defence he is here making for himself before King Agrippa, represents it as a Part of his Apostolical Office, not only to shew Men that they should *repent and turn to God*; but that they should *do Works meet for Repentance*; the Words must be understood as implying, that where Penitents live, and have Opportunities for it, there indeed 'tis incumbent on them to testify, by a future Reformation of their Lives, that their Repentance was sincere; but if God does not grant them a longer Term of Life, then he will graciously accept their good Resolutions of a new Obedience, as if they had liv'd to put them in Execution.

It being a Matter of some Difficulty to determine concerning the Validity of such a late and fruitless Repentance: My Business, from these Words, shall be,

I. To lay before you the chief Arguments on both Sides of the Question concerning the Validity of it. And,

II. To shew, that take what Side of the Question you please, 'tis the highest Folly Men can be guilty of, to delay their Repentance to the last and concluding Scene of their Lives.

First, I am to lay before you the chief Arguments on both Sides the Question concerning the Validity of a Late or Death-bed Repentance. And this I shall do, by setting them in the best Light I can, and giving them all the Force they appear to me capable of.

(I.) And, First, I begin with the Opinion of those, who represent the Case of a Sinner, that defers his Repentance to a Death-bed, as wholly



ly desperate; even tho' we could suppose it to be sincere. As harsh as this Doctrine may seem; yet it must be own'd, the Reasons whereby it is supported, are by no means contemptible. For,

1. First, 'Tis urg'd by those who maintain it, that Christianity is represented as a State of continual Striving, and Watching, and Praying, and doing all Diligence: That 'tis compar'd to a Race, wherein those only that run through the several Stages of it, from the Beginning to the End, shall obtain the Prize. To the same effect, Christians are represented also as Soldiers, fighting under the Captain of their Salvation, the Lord Christ, against those powerful Enemies the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. Now a militant State, especially where an Enemy is always at hand, and ready to make his Attacks, supposes Men to be all the while under strict Discipline, and constantly attending the several Posts or Offices assign'd them.

2. 'Tis further urg'd, that more fully to explain the Meaning of these Metaphorical Expressions, we are requir'd to *live unto the Lord*, Rom. xiv. 8. To be *stedfast, unmoveable*, always abounding, in the *Work of the Lord*, 1 Cor. xv. 58. That we be *blameless and harmless, the Sons of God, without Rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse Nation, among whom we are to shine, as Lights in the World*, Phil. ii. 15. How does a Sinner, who exercises not any Act of Repentance till the last Moments of his Life, come up to these Characters, or indeed to any one of them?

3. As to the Precepts of the Gospel require, so the Promises of it are all made upon Condition of a constant and uniform Course of Obedience. *If ye abide in me, and my Words abide in you,* (says our

our Blessed Saviour) you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done to you. Tho' these Words were spoken by our Lord more immediately to the Apostles, yet they are, without doubt, design'd also to encourage the Faith and Obedience of all his true and genuine Disciples: And therefore we are said, to be made Partakers of Christ, if we hold the Beginning of our Confidence stedfast unto the End, Heb. iii. 14. To the same Effect the Apostle argues in another Place; Having therefore, says he, these Promises, let us cleanse our selves from all Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God; 2 Cor. vii.

If the Promises then of the Gospel are only made to Christians upon these or the like Conditions; How can we reconcile the Hopes of a dying Sinner with them? Of a Sinner who never had any vital or sensible Communion with Christ? Who has been so far from going on to Perfection in a State of holy Living, that he has hitherto perhaps liv'd to all Appearance without God in the World, or so much as any true or distinct Notion of Holiness.

4. 'Tis said further, that at the Day of Judgment, Sentence will pass upon Men, not according to some transient and occasional Acts of Piety and Religion, but according to the general Course and Tenor of their Lives, or the habitual and standing Bent of their Inclinations towards Good or Evil. Our Saviour tells us, Mat. xvi. 27. That he will come in the Glory of his Father, with his Angels; and then he shall Reward every Man according to his Works. And therefore, Rev. xx. 12. God Almighty is represented, at the great Day of Account, as opening the Books, wherein the several Actions of Men are (as it were)

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registred, and judging them out of those things, which are written in the Books, according to their Works.

Upon all these Considerations of the general Expressions in Scripture, concerning the Necessity of a *holy Life*, of the Precepts and Promises of the Gospel, and the Account we have in it of the Process of the Last Judgment; several Pious and Learned Men are of Opinion, that Sinners who have all along liv'd in a wicked and unregenerate State, and never repent till they come to die, cannot, according to the Terms of the New Covenant, *die the Death of the Righteous*: Tho' we could suppose, that there is much greater Reason always to suspect, that their Repentance may be sincere.

For Repentance, say they, in the Scripture-Notion of it, does not barely imploy a thorough Change of Mind, and a steady Resolution of Amendment, but a new and actual Obedience: And a Resolution to become better, can no more be called that New Obedience, than the Spring can be called the Harvest, or a Blossom the Fruit. A good Resolution is a hopeful Step to begin our Obedience upon; but till it carry us forward, and discover it self in some real and sensible Effects, it is still only a Principle of Obedience, but cannot be called Obedience it self.

Thus *John* the Baptist makes true Repentance consist, not in a Desire to *flee from the Wrath to come*, for that is common to the most profligate and obdurate Sinners, and 'tis to be fear'd the Repentance of Sinners, in their last Moments, generally proceeds from no better a Principle; but this Excellent Person advises those that came  
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to his Baptism, as they desir'd to be Penitent to any good Effect, that they would *bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance*. Yet it must be granted, there is a wide Difference between the first Converts to Christianity, and those who have liv'd all along in the Use of God's Ordinances, and the Means of Grace. Accordingly the Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, supposes Christians, not running, as it were in a continued Circle of sinning and repenting, but daily proceeding in all Virtue and Godliness of Living: *Let us, (says he,) go on to Perfection; not laying again the Foundation of Repentance from dead Works*, Heb. vi. 1. He makes Repentance the Foundation, the Beginning of the Christian Life; What shall we then think of their Condition, who only repent at the last Period of their Lives, and begin and end the great Work God has given them to do at the same time? To suppose this practicable, would be to reduce Christianity into a very narrow Compass indeed.

5. Men are the more confirm'd in this Opinion, that Repentance does not only consist in our forsaking of Sin, and resolving to do well, but in the actual, or rather indeed habitual Practice of Piety; because we have no Instance or Example in Scripture of any Person that was sav'd at the Article of Death, who had all along liv'd in a wicked and vicious Course of Life.

As to the Case of the Thief upon the Cross (besides that it was extraordinary, and which therefore no Rules can be drawn from, in the ordinary and standing Methods of God's Grace) we do not know how he had behav'd himself in the *general* Course of his Life; he might have been drawn into the Fact he is charged with in  
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the Gospel, by Ignorance, by Inadvertency, or Surprise. These are mitigating Circumstances of his Crime; and some of the best Men in Scripture are charg'd with Crimes of as high a Nature, and with committing them deliberately. This poor Criminal might have been, in other Respects, of a regular and sober Life, or he might during the Time he was in Prison, have exercis'd a hearty Repentance for his past Sins and Miscarriages, and have evidenc'd the Sincerity of his Repentance by some real and sensible Effects. We know nothing to the contrary of all this; and we ought by the Rules of Christian Charity, to put the most favourable Construction on the Actions of Men, they will reasonably bear.

What Comfort can a Sinner, who makes Profession of Christianity, draw from such an Instance, that has liv'd for many Years in a wilful and presumptuous State of Sin, and given himself up to all Manner of Vice and Impiety without Remorse? Other Arguments, I know, are made Use of in Answer to this Case of the dying Thief: But what has been said is sufficient to convince the Libertine, that he has nothing to hope from it.

As to the Parable of those, who were call'd at the last Hour, and yet receiv'd the same Wages with those, who bore the Heat and Burthen of the Day: It is equally insignificant to prove the Validity of a Death-bed Repentance. The Design of that Parable is plainly to shew, That the *Gentiles*, under the Gospel Dispensation, are entitl'd to the same Privileges with the *Jews*, who were the *first* in Covenant with God, and call'd so many Ages before to be his chosen and

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peculiar People. Accordingly our Saviour himself explains the Design of this Parable, Luke xiii. 29, 30. *They shall come, says he, from the East, and from the West, and from the North, and from the South, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God; or be admitted within the Pale of the Christian Church; for so the Kingdom of God usually signifies in the New Testament; and there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last, that is, while the Gentile Converts share the Privileges of the Gospel, the Jews for their Obstinacy and Impenitence shall be excluded the Benefit of them.*

If no Arguments can be drawn from this Parable, for the Validity of a Death-bed Repentance; What shall we say to that Parable of the wise and foolish Virgins, which seems to conclude directly against it? For *while the Bridegroom carry'd, i. e. during the Time allotted us in this Life to provide for Eternity, the wise Virgins had taken care to have Oyl in their Lamps; so that when he came they had nothing to do but to trim them and make them shine brighter: By which is signify'd to us, that we ought throughout the whole Course of our Lives, to adorn our selves with all Christian Virtues and Graces, that so we may be in constant readiness, whenever our Lord calls upon us to meet him. But the foolish Virgins had trifled away that time which was given them to prepare for the coming of the Bridegroom, in vain and foreign Amusements; and therefore, tho' they us'd all the Arts they could think of to retrieve their former Omissions, yet they had no effect. At last, when no other Method would take, they come and put themselves in the Form of Penitents,*

tents, wholly upon the Bridegroom's Favour, saying *Lord, Lord open to us*; but alas! now 'twas too late, the Day of Grace was past: They find the Door shut upon them, the Bridegroom is inaccessible, and answers, *Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.*

There is the greater Reason to suppose, that this Parable is particularly design'd by our Lord, to shew the Incapacity Sinners are under of being sav'd, who never take any care to prepare themselves for another World, till they are going out of this: There is the greater Reason, I say, to suppose this from the Application which our Saviour himself makes of this Parable, *Mat. xxv. 13. Watch (says he) therefore, for ye know neither the Day nor the Hour, when the Son of Man cometh.*

6. Besides these Arguments from Scripture, there are others made use of from the Nature and Reason of the Thing it self, to shew the Invalidity of a Death-bed Repentance. True Repentance implies at least a thorough Change in the Frame and Temper of our Minds; it requires that we put off concerning the former Conversation the Old Man, which is corrupt according to deceitful Lusts; and that we put on the New Man, which is created in Righteousness and true Holiness. Now 'tis as contrary to the Nature and establish'd Order of Things, that a Man should all on a sudden pass out of one of these different States into another; as that he should be in a high Fever, and the same Moment in a perfect State of Health. The ill Habits of the Soul, as they are contracted by degrees, so they can only be destroyed by contrary and repeated Acts. A dying Sinner, under the Circumstances he is, may

may not be sensible perhaps of the Power of his habitual and vicious Inclinations; but he ought not therefore to believe that he is got loose from them, any more than a Man can imagine he is perfectly cur'd of a Wound, because the Pain of it may sometimes intermit.

And till the Body of Sin be destroy'd, how good soever our Resolutions are, we are but where we were. And should we die with such ineffective Resolutions, God who sees us in a State of Disorder, and whose Judgment is always according to Truth, cannot (say they, whose Principles I here proceed upon) but judge us, notwithstanding all our Designs of forsaking our Sins, to dye in a sinful and unregenerate State. So that could we suppose the Repentance of an old beaten Sinner in his last Moments, might recommend him to the pardoning Grace of God, yet without his sanctifying Grace also, and that too in a very extraordinary Manner, such a Sinner could not dye in that heavenly Temper of Mind, which is necessary to qualify him for the Vision and Enjoyment of God; for according to the ordinary and standing Methods of God's Grace, long and inveterate Habits cannot be destroy'd by sudden and bare Resolutions, how sincere soever they may be.

According therefore to that Principle, whose Grounds I have been explaining, nothing but a Miracle can save a dying Penitent, who has liv'd all along in a sinful impenitent State; that is, nothing can save such a Sinner but what might have sav'd him, if he had never exercised any Repentance at all: Nothing but that Divine Almighty Power, which is able of these



Stones to raise up Children to God. I proceed now,

2. In the Second Place, To lay before you the Reasons of those who are of Opinion, that a Late or Death-bed Repentance, if it be sincere, may come within the Conditions of the New Covenant, upon which the Pardon of Sin, and Eternal Life are promised. Such a Repentance, I mean as God foresees, would effectually discover it self in our future Reformation and Amendment, in case he should grant us a longer Term of Life. And,

1. It is said, That in other Cases where there is no Opportunity for practising our Duty, God will accept a virtual instead of an actual Obedience. By a virtual Obedience, I understand not only a true Sense and Conviction upon our Minds of the Obligations we are under to obey the Laws of the Gospel; but a firm and settled Resolution to do it, as the Occasions of Obedience may be offer'd: And by actual Obedience, I understand our putting those good Resolutions in practice, when such Occasions are offer'd. Now the Apostle, in the Case of Charity to the Poor, has expressly determin'd, that if there be first a willing Mind, a truly Christian and generous Inclination to do good, tho' it cannot exert it self in external Acts of Beneficence; yet is *accepted according to what a Man has, and not according to what he hath not, or is not in a Capacity of performing.*

And indeed, if God did not in other Cases accept a virtual for an actual Obedience, that is (as we commonly say) the Will for the Deed, the Obedience of the best of Men would be only Partial and Temporary; because 'tis impossible

ble that any Man should actually discharge all the Duties of Religion at all times : Nay, there are some particular Duties of Religion which very good Men may not have a Call or Opportunity to exercise at any time. From whence 'tis concluded, that if a Man really repent of the Sins and Follies of his Life, and heartily resolve for the future to live in a faithful and conscientious Discharge of his Duty ; God, who knows the Sincerity of his Heart will approve it, as if he had really put his Resolutions in practice. They think it not consistent with the Goodness of God, that he should condemn Men, merely for want of an Opportunity to do what they are thoroughly and in good earnest resolv'd upon *doing*.

If we may not be allow'd to judge thus favourably of the Case of late Penitents, What shall we think of those (and there were a considerable Number of them) who had no sooner embraced Christianity, but they suffer'd Martyrdom for the Profession of it ? Shall we say, that these short-liv'd Converts, who were faithful unto Death, shall not inherit the Crown of Life ? Shall we be so uncharitable to conclude, that because they had not time to evidence the Sincerity of their Repentance, by *doing Works* meet for it, that therefore they dy'd in a State of Impenitence and Disorder ? No Man will say so. It seems then reasonable to suppose, that God may, and often does, by a special Grace preventing Men, work an instantaneous Conversion in them, and infuse into their Hearts such a ruling habitual Charity, as may destroy the Power of all former sinful Habits. And indeed, without supposing them thus thoroughly renew-

ed in the Spirit of their Minds, we cannot conclude that those pious Martyrs died in a salvable State. The Apostle having declar'd, That tho' a Man *give his Body to be burned, and have not Charity (i.e. a ruling and habitual Charity in the most extensive Signification of the Word) it profiteth nothing.* And therefore,

2. That God Almighty does sometimes infuse such a Charity into the Hearts of dying Sinners upon their sincere Repentance, seems highly agreeable to the Doctrine of the Church of *England*. The Practice of whose Clergy it is, not only to administer the Holy Sacrament to sick Persons who desire it, tho' they have been of a very wicked and dissolute Life; but to notorious Criminals and condemn'd Malefactors, where they give any visible or publick Testimony of their Repentance.

This Practice of the Church, 'tis said, supposes it to be her Doctrine, That if the greatest Sinners truly repent, and turn to God, tho' in their last Moments, they may partake worthily of the Lord's Supper; Why else is it administered to them? And if they be duly qualify'd to partake of so high an Ordinance, then 'tis beyond Supposition, that they partake of all the real Effects and Benefits of it. And what these Effects and Benefits are, the Scripture represents to us, by calling the Elements of Bread and Wine in this Sacrament the Lord's Body; and the Administration of them, the Communion of his Body and Blood. These are *high* Expressions, and can import no less than that hereby the Blessed Ends, for which the Body of Christ was crucify'd and his Blood shed upon the Cross, are really and effectually made good to the worthy

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Receiver. So that their Sins are not only pardon'd, but their Natures sanctified and renewed: *They dwell in Christ, and Christ in them; they are one with Christ, and Christ with them.* 'Tis impossible that a Penitent, upon whom the Holy Sacrament, according to the Doctrine of the Church, has these heavenly and sublime Effects, should die in an unregenerate or unsanctify'd State. But,

3. As to the Objections on the other side, from the Metaphorical Allusions, that occur in the Gospel, from the Precepts and Promises of it, and the Process of the Last Judgment, which were said all along to suppose an entire and continu'd Course of Obedience: 'Tis answered, They may be accounted for from the Distinction of a virtual Obedience, where Men have not Time or Opportunity to reduce it into Act. And that God will look upon a foreseen Course of Piety and Reformation, which Men sincerely resolve upon, as if they had liv'd to execute their Resolutions.

'Tis granted indeed, that we have no Example in Scripture of any dissolute and habitual Sinner, to prove the Validity of a Death-bed Repentance. The Case of the Thief upon the Cross is, for the Reasons I have mention'd, and many others, so foreign to that of Christians, who have all their Lives profess'd Christianity, and liv'd in open Contempt of the Laws of it, that 'tis really matter of Wonder to hear it so often urg'd in favour of late and dying Penitents. 'Tis acknowledg'd further, that the Parable of those, who were call'd at the last Hour, has no relation in the main Scope and Design of it, as we have observ'd, to such Penitents. But



'tis answer'd again, That the Silence and want of Precedent in Scripture, to prove that a Death-bed Repentance may be valid, is at the best but a Negative Argument, which ought not to be admitted against great Appearances of Truth and Reason on the other side.

As to the Parable of the Virgins, it seems to be directly intended to discourage Men from casting all their Hopes upon the uncertain Issue of a Death-bed Repentance. This too is readily own'd by those who contend for the Validity of such a Repentance. But then, say they, we are not to strain every Passage or Circumstance of a Parable, which is mention'd for the greater Decorum of it, too far; but are to consider the chief Argument and Tendency of it, according to the general Sense, and other concurring Proofs of the Holy Scriptures. And therefore, what we are here to understand by the Parable of the Virgins is this; that all the Prayers and Tears, all the deep Sighs, and bitter Lamentations of a Sinner, in the Extremity of Life, will be to no effect, except he sincerely repent and turn with all his Heart to God, which because 'tis a Case that very rarely happens, and which when it does happen, no Sinner, considering how deceitful the Heart of Man is, can certainly know to be his own Case; therefore all wise Persons will take care to be always prepar'd for the coming of the Lord, and not put their everlasting Salvation upon the dangerous, and to say the best of it, very *disconsolate* Issue of a Death-bed Repentance.

Thus I have stated the Arguments as fully and in as narrow a Compass as I could, on both sides of the Question, concerning the Validity  
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of a Late and Death-bed Repentance, without thinking it necessary to give my own Opinion directly in the Case; because I am to shew,

2. In the Second Place, that take what side of the Question you please, 'tis the highest Folly Men can be guilty of to delay their Repentance to the last and concluding Scene of their Lives. For,

1. If you do believe, that he only who leads a holy and religious Life can have hope in his Death; and that a Sinner who does not timely repent and turn to God, so as to do Works meet for Repentance, is excluded the Covenant of Grace; why then, considering the uncertainty of Life, you have in effect every Moment you continue in a sinful State, the Sentence of Death, of eternal Death, in your selves? And should you happen to die, as you cannot foresee you shall not, by a sudden Disease or Accident, by your own Principles, and out of your own Mouth shall God judge you.

You will say, perhaps, tho' you do not design to put off your Repentance to the very last Period of your Lives, as looking upon it at that time of no Consequence, yet you will one time or other hereafter, devote a considerable part of your Lives to the Service of God, in order to prepare for a happy Death. But what if our Lord come at a Day or an Hour that you know not of, and before that future Time commence which you intend to set apart for your Repentance? What if you be surpriz'd by some mortal Distemper, so that tho' you would repent you can bring forth no Fruits meet for Repentance? In this Case, according to your own Sentiments, your Condition must be, in the

ordinary Methods of God's Grace, hopeless and past Remedy.

There is one possible Remedy indeed, and but one, whereby you may hope, in your last Extremity, to be sav'd, and that is by the Almighty Power of God; he may, if he pleases, snatch you out of those Flames, your Sins are about to plunge you into; he may, by the same supernatural Power, cause a Man to be born again, when he is old: But we can no more draw Consequences, from what God may *possibly* do in one Case, than in the other. And if he so seldom depart from the Simplicity of his Laws, and the ordinary Methods of his governing the World, for the sake of good Men; Why should we think that he will interpose by a miraculous Power, to save an incorrigible and rebellious Sinner, who has taken all the Pains he could to work out his *own* Damnation? But,

2. Because Sinners are more generally of Opinion, that a Death-bed Repentance may, if it be sincere, at last save them; I shall more particularly apply what I have to say to such Persons, and desire them to go along with me, in the following Considerations.

1. 'Tis extremely uncertain, whether Men, who go on in a Course of Sin, in Hopes that they may take up and remedy all at last by a Death-bed Repentance, may, when they come to die, have any Time to repent. God often makes himself known by the swift Judgment, which he executes on such bold and notorious Sinners; he frequently cuts the Thread of their Lives short, and snatches them away in the midst of their Days, and their Sins at once. 'Tis in vain to hope, that Youth or Strength,  
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Power or Policy, can protect a Sinner's Life, when God has prepar'd for him the Instruments of Death. God, who has all Nature at his Command, and can make a thousand unforeseen Accidents, or the most inconsiderable of his Creatures instrumental in the Hands of his Avenging Justice. Many Instances might be given, some perhaps out of your own Observation, to this Purpose; but for certain, the longer any Man lives to provoke the Divine Justice, the more Reason he has to fear that this may be his own Case.

2. But what if a Sinner should not be surpriz'd by a sudden and immediate Death, but have some short warning of its Approaches; yet how is he sure that he shall be in a Condition to exercise any true or proper Acts of Repentance? He may be depriv'd of the Use of his Understanding or Memory, or the Pains of his Distemper may seize upon him in so violent a Manner, that tho' he may have some confused Notions and Designs of Repentance, yet he cannot apply his Thoughts distinctly, and without great Distraction to the Business of it. And Repentance is a Work, which at all times, but especially, at a Time, when a thorough Change of a corrupt Heart is to be wrought all at once, requires great Attention and Composure of Mind. And therefore surely when a Man is so disorder'd both in Body and Mind, that he is commonly unfit to settle his temporal Affairs, if there has been no Care taken to that End before-hand, he will be much more unfit to examine, how many or how great the Sins of his Life have been, and to state Accounts so long depending between God and his own Conscience. But then,

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3. Supposing God Almighty should be so merciful to a Sinner, as to allow him not only some short time to prepare for Death, but the free and undisturb'd Use of his Reason: Let us suppose, I say, a Case which very rarely happens, that the Approaches of Death should be so easy and gradual, as to give a Man no sensible Pain of Body, or Disturbance of Mind; yet 'tis still uncertain whether he may find in his Heart any true Inclinations to repent and turn to God.

For 'tis no easy Matter for a Man to resolve in good earnest to hate what he has all his Life long plac'd his great Happiness and Satisfaction in; or even to desire to free himself from the Chains, which have held him for many Years in so agreeable a Captivity. Few Men have such Power over themselves, and no Man, without the special Grace of God, can have it; which of all Persons, those who have long done Despite to the Holy Spirit, have the least Reason to hope, tho' they stand in Need of a far greater Measure and Degree of it.

And therefore we find that your old habitual Sinners sometimes go out of the World, without discovering any sensible Remorse for their Sins; and in particular, that they whose Hearts have been for a long time wholly set upon the World, cannot get their Thoughts loose from it, tho' at the very Moment it is sinking, as it were, from under them. So great is the Power of evil Habits, not only to corrupt our Hearts, but to infatuate our Minds, and to stifle the common Sentiments of Reason, as well as those of Grace and Religion. But,

*Fourthly and Lastly,* Let us suppose further, that a Sinner in his last Moments may have some good

good Inclinations towards Repentance, yet still 'tis uncertain, whether they may be so well grounded, or rise so high, as to make his Repentance sincere. For 'tis natural for wicked Men, if they be not wholly hard'ned through the Deceitfulness of Sin, to have their Consciences awaken'd under the Apprehensions of Death, and a Judgment to come. So that they cannot but wish at least that they had serv'd God more faithfully, and never indulg'd themselves in those transient Pleasures of Sin, for which they are now in imminent Danger of suffering *the Vengeance of eternal Fire*; why, this is no more than the Repentance of an hard'ned Malefactor, when he is going to Execution; a mere Motion of Self-love is sufficient to fill him with Regret, for having made himself a Sacrifice of publick Justice, without any real Change in the Temper and Disposition of his Mind. And 'tis to be fear'd, that the Repentance of a dying Libertine seldom proceeds from any better Principle, than that of a servile Fear of *suffering* for his Sins; for he now finds that he can sin no longer, and that there is no other Remedy left to deliver him from the Punishment of his Sins, but to repent and turn to God: Besides, he looks upon the Terrors which he feels in his Conscience, and the Indignation he expresses at himself for having incurr'd the Wrath of Almighty God, as proper Evidences of the Sincerity of his Repentance. And it must be own'd these are good Ingredients of a saving Repentance; but alas! How often do they prove of themselves to be in the Event deceitful and Ill-grounded? And of those Sinners, whom God restores to Health from any dangerous Sickness, How few are there  
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(in Comparison) that evidence the Sincerity of the Resolutions they then made, by a thorough Change and Reformation of their Lives? How quickly do their good Purposes, and the Efforts of their Zeal, pass away many times like the Morning Dew, as soon as they feel the Return of vital Heat and Strength; as soon as they think the Danger is over, and they have nothing more at present to fear?

And now, for a Conclusion, let us put all these Considerations together. *First*, 'Tis uncertain whether a Sinner may have Time to repent in his last Moments. *Secondly*, 'Tis uncertain whether, by Reason of the Disorder he is in, he may be capable of exercising any proper or distinct Acts of Repentance. Then again, in the *Third Place*, 'Tis uncertain whether, tho' he have Time and the perfect Use of his Reason, he may have any good Inclination to the Work of Repentance. But *Fourthly* and *Lastly*, The greatest Uncertainty of all is, whether, supposing there were no Hazard in any of these Things, his Repentance may be real and sincere.

So that here is Uncertainty upon Uncertainty, to discourage any Man from the Hopes of a happy Death, who defers his Repentance till he come to dye. And therefore *admitting* that a Death-bed Repentance, if sincere, may be available to Salvation; yet there are so many Blanks against this one Prize, that no Man, one would think, who might otherways be secure of it, should run the Hazard, the almost desperate Hazard, of drawing it. Even those Persons, who talk the most loosely of a Death-bed Repentance, yet look upon it as a Plank after Shipwreck,

# SERMON VII. 173

wrack, upon which, 'tis possible indeed, a Man may come safe to Shore; but no Man that duly consults his Safety, would chuse to venture his Life upon such a Contingency.

In order therefore to a comfortable and well-grounded Assurance, that we shall be found true and sincere Penitents at the Hour of Death; God of his great Mercy grant, that we may serve him in Righteousness and true Holiness all the Days of our Life.

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S E R M O N

we take the Commandments of God in  
Scripture, concerning the Duty of Prayer  
his first Sermon, it might be supposed, that all  
our Time ought to be wholly taken up with it;  
and that by Contemning the other Duties  
join'd us by the Law of God, would be of no  
service or Obligation to us. But this would be  
to suppose God, laying inconsistent and impossible  
Conditions of Obedience on his Creatures, that  
which indeed nothing can be imagin'd more im-  
possible to him.



# SERMON VIII.

The Qualifications of Prayer, with respect to the Temper and Disposition of Mind wherewith we ought to pray.

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EPHES. VI. 18.

*Praying always, with all manner of Prayer, and Supplication in the Spirit.*

**D**ID we take the Commands of God in Scripture, concerning the Duty of Prayer in a strict Sense, it might be supposed, that all our Time ought to be wholly taken up with it; and that, by Consequence, the other Duties enjoin'd us by the Laws of God, would be of no Force, or Obligation to us: But this would be to suppose God laying inconsistent and impossible Conditions of Obedience on his Creatures, than which indeed nothing can be imagin'd more impossible to him.

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And therefore, when our Saviour teaches us, *Luke xviii. 1. That Men ought always to Pray.* When we are commanded again by the Apostle, *1 Theff. v. 17. To Pray without ceasing*; and in the Words of my Text, *to Pray always, with all manner of Prayer and Supplication in the Spirit*: We are to understand these Expressions, as agreeable to a common and ordinary way of Speaking in the World; as when we say, A Man is always doing, what we usually find him at, in the way of his proper Business or Profession. And it must be granted, there is no Duty, which Christians ought to be found more in the Practice of, than this of Prayer; or which 'tis incumbent on us to give our selves up more constantly to. This is the lowest Sense we can put upon the Expression the Apostle here uses, of *Praying always*; and which therefore must denote, at least, that Prayer, in every kind of it, or in the Words of the Text, *all manner of Prayer*, is a Duty of very great Importance, and constant Obligation. But I shall particularly apply my self, at present, to consider this Duty, with respect to that Branch of it, we call *Supplication*; or the putting up our Requests to God for such Spiritual, or Temporal Mercies, as we stand most in need of.

And in speaking to this Duty, because 'tis of so great Concernment to us, both to have right Notions of it, and to practise it, I shall observe the following Method.

I. I shall consider the Qualifications of it, with respect to the Temper and Disposition of Mind wherewith we ought to Pray; we must make our *Supplication in the Spirit*.

II, The

## 176 SERMON VIII.

II. The Reasons why the frequent Practice of it in Scripture is so strictly enjoyn'd us, Why we are requir'd and suppos'd to Pray *always*.

III. I shall conclude with some proper Motives and Arguments to the Practice of this Duty.

*First*, I am to consider the Qualifications of Prayer, with respect to the Temper and Disposition of Mind wherewith we ought to Pray; and I shall reduce, what I have to say on this Head, to the Five following Particulars.

1. Piety.
2. Charity.
3. Humility.
4. Faith: And,
5. Lastly, Fervency.

These being all of them the Graces of the Holy Spirit; when we come before God with our Hearts possess'd and inflam'd with them, then, and then we may only be said to make our Supplication *in the Spirit*.

The first Qualification of acceptable Prayer, is,

1. *Piety*; or a due and conscientious Regard to the Laws of Religion in general. This is every where requir'd in the Scriptures as a necessary and indispenblie Condition to recommend those who come before God by Prayer to his Favour and Acceptance: *The Eyes of the Lord, saith the Psalmist, are upon the Righteous, and his Ears are open unto their Cry. The Face of the Lord is against them that do Evil, Psal. xxxiv. 10, 11.* So again, God Almighty declares by the Prophet *Isaiah*, Chap. i. 13. to the Jews, that, by

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reason of their Impieties, when they spread forth their Hands, he would hide his Eyes from them; yea, when they made many Prayers, he would not hear. Accordingly, the Apostle St. John, 1 Eph. iii. 21. makes a Holy Temper and Disposition of Mind, the only Foundation of our Confidence in the Favour of God, when we address our Prayers to him; Beloved, if our Hearts condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his Commandments, and do those Things that are pleasing in his Sight. Can we after this think of appearing in the Presence of God, and putting up our Prayers to him, without first preparing our Hearts, and putting away the Evil of our Doings from before his Eyes?

2. Charity; as comprehending under it the Love we owe both to God and Man. 'Tis with this Divine Principle of the Love of God, that we find the Devotions of Holy David animated and inflam'd to so great a Height; his Soul waiteth for the Lord, and his Heart rejoiceth in him, Psal. xxxiv. 2, 3. God is the strength of his Heart, and his Portion for ever, Psal. lxxiii. 26. and for that Reason, and in the Motion of so pious a Reflection, he concludes, ver. 28. That 'tis good for him to draw nigh unto God. Accordingly, the Prophet Isaiah, in the Name of God, complains of the Jews, as guilty of the highest Indignity and Affront they could offer him, by pretending to honour him with their Lips, while their Hearts were far from him. Indeed, in all the Instances of our Duty, but especially in this of Prayer, and more immediate Address to God, we should do well to bear constantly in Mind those Words of Solomon, and suppose them as spoken and directed



# 178 SERMON VIII.

to every one of us in particular, *My Son give me thine Heart.*

As *Charity* imports the Love of our Neighbour, 'tis also a proper Qualification for Prayer, both as it denotes an Inclination to do good Offices to others, and to pardon the ill Offices done to our selves.

If a beneficent Temper be at all Times acceptable to that All-Perfect Being, *who is Good and does Good*; it seems in the very Nature and Reason of the Thing proper to recommend us to him, at a Time when we are requesting some special Grace or Favour of his Goodness: And therefore the Prophet *Isaiah*, Chap. lviii. 8, 9. having enumerated some of the most generous and noble Instances of Charity, concludes at the Ninth Verse, that there is nothing which gives us a more ready and favourable Access to God, or rather wherein he is more forward to meet us; *Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.*

As to a forgiving Temper of Mind, our Lord has very particularly determin'd the Necessity of it, in order to the Acceptance of our Prayers, in that famous Passage (to mention no other) *Mat. v. 23, 24. If thou bring thy Gift to the Altar, the Reason equally holds with respect to the Sacrifice of Prayer, and there rememberest that thy Brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy Gift before the Altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy Brother, and then come and offer thy Gift.* By Parity of Reason, I say, we ought not to presume to Pray to God, while we are under the Power of any reigning revengful Inclinations, much less to expect that God will favourably hear such Prayers.

3. *Humility.* The Reason of this is founded on our absolute Dependance on God, the Consideration of his Infinite Glories and Perfections, and of our own Vileness and Demerits: Shall we, who are Dust and Ashes, take upon us to speak to the Lord? Yes; he has permitted, he has commanded us, from the greatest to the least to do it. But with what profound Awe and Reverence ought we then to approach him? If we are expected upon account of their Authority, or other superior Advantages of Life, to put on an Air of Submission in the Presence of our Fellow-Creatures, of *Sinners*; With what Sentiments of Respect, and Lowliness of Mind, ought we to *come before the Lord, and bow our selves before the most high God?*

But besides the natural Reason of the Thing, *Humility*, in Scripture, is made a Condition of acceptable Prayer. So holy *David* assures us, *Psal. ix. 12.* that God *forgetteth not the Cry of the Humble*: But what he says again, *Psal. x. 19.* is more particular, and very much to the Advantage of this Grace of Humility in our religious Addresses to God: *Lord, thou hast heard the Desire of the Humble; thou wilt prepare their Heart; thou wilt cause thine Ear to hear.*

3. *Faith.* By the Prayer of Faith, as the Apostle expresses it, I understand a generous Trust and Confidence in God, that our Prayers will be heard, not absolutely, but with Submission to what God sees good and proper for us; that is, where there is no Condition express'd to the contrary in Scripture, nor reserv'd in the wise and secret Designs of God's Providence, there we may firmly and assuredly believe, that he will grant us what we desire. And 'tis with

this Restriction we are to explain those Words of our Saviour, whether they were spoken peculiarly to his Disciples, or to all Christians in general; *Therefore I say unto you, what things soever you desire when you pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.* St. James is to be understood in the same Sense, when he requires that we should *ask in Faith, nothing wavering,* Chap. i. 6.

And the Reason I take it, why so great and encouraging Promises are made in Scripture to the *Prayer of Faith*, is, that hereby we testify our Dependance on God, and his absolute Disposall of all Things, in the most sensible manner. When all Human Means fail, and there is no visible Prospect of effecting what we desire, then to pray to God that he *would*, and to trust in him that he *will* bring it to pass, is properly to pray to him *as God*: 'Tis to do the highest and noblest Act of Homage we are capable of doing to his Sovereignty: 'Tis to acknowledge him the supreme Lord and Governour of the World, and to ascribe to him the glorious Attributes of Wisdom and Goodness, and Power, which are necessary to the Government of it. And for the same Reason, no doubt, it is that such high Things are spoken all along in Scripture, of Trust in God; as if hereby we did in some peculiar manner, do Honour to his *eternal Power and Godhead*.

5. The last Qualification of Prayer I mention'd was *Fervency*, or a strict and intense Application of our Minds to the great Affair we are about. The Reason of our being fervent in Prayer, arises from several Considerations; I shall take notice of Two or Three of them

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1. From the Nature and Importance of the Duty it self; in proportion as any Business we apply our selves to, nearly affects us in our Interests, we are usually the more solicitous in the Management and Prosecution of it. Prayer is a Means of interesting us in that which we ought to desire and prefer above all other Things, and upon which all our other Designs depend, the Love and Favour of God, and the wise Disposals of his Grace and Providence; and therefore ought not to be undertaken lightly, and, as God knows we sometimes observe it in our religious Assemblies, carelessly, and as if it did not deserve our Attention; but if we really consider what we are a doing, and be in Earnest in the Discharge of so great and sacred a Duty, we must for the same Reason set about it with the most fervent and devout Affections. There cannot be a greater Indication, that Men have no true or tolerable Notion of what they mean by coming to the Publick Service of God, than that loose Indifference and Supineness wherewith they behave themselves at it.

2. Another Consideration which renders it the more incumbent on us to be fervent in Prayer, is taken from an Infirmity of our Nature, so generally complain'd of, whereby we are betray'd to admit foreign and wandring Thoughts in Prayer: The greater Weakness we know our selves in any kind subject to, the more earnestly we should apply our selves to the proper Method of curing it. Now there is no Means so likely to prevent the Incurision of any idle or vain Amusements, while we are at our Devotions, as when we inflame them to the greatest Height we can, and awaken all the Powers of our Souls to keep up our Attention in them. Every Man  
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may be sensible from his own Experience, as well as the natural Reason of the Thing it self, that the less he attends to his Prayers, and in his Heart considers them, the more open and unguarded will his Mind lie to the Impression of vain or vicious Thoughts.

And therefore, tho' very good Men, especially of a copious and lively Imagination, may lament their being subject to wandring Thoughts in Prayer; yet we are not to plead any natural Infirmary in Bar of our Duty, where the proper Means of remedying such an Infirmary are prescrib'd, and in our Power: And tho' I will not say, that we have Power at all Times to bear our Minds steady and even upon the View of spiritual Objects; yet this I do not doubt to affirm, that we might in a much greater measure prevent loose and impertinent Thoughts in Prayer, did we perform it with greater Zeal and Ardor of Mind; and that therefore we often charge that upon the Infirmary of our Nature, which is the Effect of our own Carelessness or Inadvertency.

3. We have the Example of the holiest and best of Men in Scripture, to recommend a fervent and intense Application of Mind in Prayer. Such was the Prayer of *Jacob* when he wrestled with God and prevail'd, *Gen. xxxii. 28.* of *Moses*, when *Joshua* gain'd that signal Victory over *Amaleck* and his People, *Exod. xvii. 13.* and of our Blessed Saviour himself, when he pray'd so earnestly in his Agony, *Luke xxii. 44.* I shall only observe further, that the Apostle *St. James* having declared, *Chap. v. 16. That the effectual fervent Prayer of a righteous Man availeth much:* He confirms the Truth of it in the next Words, by the Example of the Prophet *Elias*,  
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and the different Success of his earnest Prayer, both against, and for Rain.

But then I do not suppose, that the Zeal wherewith we ought to Pray consists in loud Exclamations, or a mimical affected Action; as if Men were to be heard for their much Speaking, or Gesticulation: No, tho' a serious and compos'd Way of Expressing our selves, and a decent external Behaviour are requir'd of us in Prayer; yet 'tis not an Ardor of Body, wherewith the greatest Hypocrites may be agitated, but of Mind, which I would recommend to you as a proper, or rather indeed necessary Qualification to render your Prayers acceptable to God.

Secondly, I proceed in the next Place to consider the Reasons, why the frequent Practice of Prayer is so strictly enjoyn'd us in Scripture? Or, why we are requir'd and suppos'd in the Words of my Text to be *Praying always*?

1. Now one Reason no doubt of this is, that Prayer is an Act of Religion, whereby God is most visibly honour'd and glorify'd; and a Sense of his Being, of his Providence, and Grace, most effectually kept up in the World. But,

2. That which I would at present more particularly insist upon, as the Reason why we are commanded to be so frequent in Prayer is, from the great and direct Influence this Duty has upon Religion in general. I have already shewn, with what Temper and Disposition of Mind we ought to Pray; but God in his great Wisdom and Goodness has so contriv'd it, that Prayer and the proper Qualifications of it, mutually conspire to animate and promote each other: So that the more we Pray the more we shall still

be qualify'd both to pray and to walk before God in all well-pleasing. This I shall particularly endeavour to shew, with respect to the Three great Duties I have already mention'd, *Piety, Charity, and Humility.*

1. Prayer conduces, in the very Nature of it, to preserve in us a holy and religious Frame of Spirit, both as it tends to the Improvement of our Graces, and to restrain us from Sin.

1. He that performs his Devotions duly and constantly to God, by contemplating the glorious Attributes of his Nature, and raising his Affections to a just Admiration of them, will, from Adoring, naturally fall to Imitation; for the more we consider the Perfections of the Divine Nature, the more we see wherein the Perfection of our own consists; and the more we discover of the Reasons and Beauty of Moral Virtue, and our Obligations to practise it. So that 'tis almost impossible for a devout Person, who, with Holy *David*, sets God continually before him, not to rise daily still higher and higher in all Divine and Godlike Attainments; if the Life of God, in our Souls, be that wherein our Growth in Grace consists, nothing is so proper, so necessary to maintain *that* Life, as the Duty I am recommending.

'Tis further to be consider'd, that when we pray, that God would give us his Grace to direct and assist, to prevent and follow us; the very Nature and Design of such a Prayer supposes that we are, or ought to be in a Disposition, at least, to concur with the Grace we pray for: For indeed, to what end should our Eyes be enlightned, but that we should follow the Light? Or our Hearts mov'd by the Spirit of God, but that

## S E R M O N VIII. 185

that we should obey his heavenly Motions? For a Man to pray that God would enable him to lead a holy, righteous and sober Life, without any Intention, or perhaps so much as any real Inclination on his own part to lead such a Life, is in the most strict and proper Sense, to offer God *the Sacrifice of Fools*, Eccles. v. 1, and to address him in Terms which import little less than a Contradiction.

For since the Spirit of God does not work upon us by an irresistible Force, but in a manner agreeable to the State and Condition of free Agents, and the Nature of Rewards and Punishments, to beg any spiritual Grace of God, without a real Desire to comply with it, is to put him upon employing a Means, in order to *no* End; which is to *mock* him in the most audacious, and to impose upon our selves in the most senseless and absurd manner.

This ought to be very well consider'd by all Persons, in their Applications to God, for his spiritual Graces, and that both in Private and Publick. In Publick, indeed, the Offence is greater to God, and more visible to Men; when notorious Sinners appear at Divine Service, and for that Reason are suppos'd to join in the Prayers of the Church, yet without any sensible Amendment or Reformation of their Lives: How is it possible to believe that such Persons pray to God (if they pray at all) with a Desire to be heard, or with an Intention, if God should hear them, to grow wiser or better? For if they really, and from the bottom of their Hearts, had such an Intention, it would by the Grace of God, in the direct Tendency of it, produce some good and real Effects.

2. Prayer



2. Prayer is no less effectual to the Restraint of our sinful Inclinations, than the Improvement of our Graces: For a Man that lives in the habitual Practice of Sin, or of any known Sin whatever, to Pray constantly to God for Pardon or Grace, yet still to run on in a continued Circle of Sinning and Praying, of Praying and Sinning, is what, out of respect to the common Reason and Ingenuity of Mankind, we could not believe, did not Experience convince us of the Possibility of the Thing: But tho' wicked Men may for a Time find some Relief to their guilty Minds by thus imposing upon their own Hearts, yet they cannot always continue under the Delusion; their Prayers will at length either get the Victory over their Sins, or their Sins over their Prayers: If they resolve not to quit their Sins, they will certainly by degrees fall off, in the Fervency of their Prayers, if not in the Frequency of them; and on the other Hand, in proportion as their Prayers are devoutly and regularly perform'd, their evil Habits will sensibly diminish and lose Ground. All the Wit of Man, and Double-dealing of his Heart, can never reconcile a State of Sin and Impenitence, with a Life of true Devotion; he cannot go on with any Satisfaction of Mind in these two Courses long; but *either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other.*

2. Prayer is an excellent Means of promoting that other great Duty of our holy Religion, Charity; as comprehending under it the Love we owe both to God and Man.

The oftner we converse with God, the more we shall discover of the glorious Perfections of his Nature; and the greater Idea we have of him,

# S E R M O N VIII. 187

him, the more we shall *Love*, and see reason to love him: And indeed, the true Cause why the Love of God does not *rule* as it ought in our Heart, is, that we do not more frequently dwell in the Contemplation of his Attributes, and represent him to our Minds, as the most excellent and amiable of Beings: We turn our Eyes from him, upon the Creatures, or are so long taken up with other Views, that by Degrees we lose sight of those divine Excellencies, which alone ought to engage our Love, because they alone can satisfy it.

But were God more in our Thoughts; did we consider that he is a Being of infinite Power and Wisdom, Holiness and Mercy; and that these Perfections are not only infinitely adorable in themselves, but in relation to us: That his Wisdom is employ'd in designing our Happiness, and his Power able to effect whatever he designs: That, tho' he is Holy in all his Ways, and in all the Methods he has prescrib'd to make us happy, yet if we happen to Sin against him, he is still upon our true Repentance, merciful to forgive our Transgressions, and receive us to Favour: How is it possible, I say, if we frequently entertain'd our Minds (and that we must of Necessity do, if we be frequent in Prayer) with such Thoughts and Meditations as these, but that our Hearts must be inflam'd to the highest Degree with the Love of a Being so infinitely, in these and all other Respects, lovely.

'Twas in the Motion of that Love, wherewith these Sentiments of the Nature and Attributes of God inspir'd holy *David*, that he wish'd he could fly unto him upon the Wings of Divine Contemplation, as it were upon those of a Dove,

*Psalms*

*Psalms* lv. 6. and that he breaks out into that just and passionate Expression of his Love, *Psalms* lxxiii. 25. *Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? And there is none upon Earth that I desire besides Thee.*

2. Charity, as it denotes the Love of our Neighbour, is highly promoted by this Duty of Prayer; and that again, both as it imports an Inclination to do good to those that stand in need of our Assistance, and to pardon those that have offended us.

1. When we address our selves to the Goodness of God, for any Blessing we want, or the Removal of any Evil we suffer; the very Nature of such an Address supposes, that to do Good is a very becoming and noble Action; because 'tis an Action worthy of God, and for which at the Instant we profess to adore him. I say, in the natural Reason of the Thing it self, our Prayers to God for any Act of his Goodness, must, if they be frequently and affectionately repeated, have some Influence on our own Hearts, and by degrees, at least, dispose us to *go and do likewise.*

And therefore 'tis hard to conceive, how a truly devout Person, should not be, in the same measure and degree, Charitable; I say, a Person truly devout: For they may be, I grant, a Devotion, to which Men may tie themselves up very strictly, without effecting any real Change in the Temper or Disposition of their Minds. Such is the Devotion of ignorant and superstitious Persons, who have no true Idea of the Nature and Attributes of God; or who, instead of worshipping him as a Being of infinite Goodness and Love to Mankind, set up in his stead a terrible Phantom of their own Imaginations, and  
make

# S E R M O N VIII. 189

make a Sacrifice of all the other Attributes and Perfections of his Nature, to that of *Power*; a Power not regulated by his Wisdom, but destroying the greatest part of Mankind, by the eternal and irrelative Decrees of an Arbitrary Will.

I do not say, but a Person who goes into this Hypothesis, may by a peculiar Happiness of natural Temper, be inclin'd to Acts of Charity and Beneficence; but then, I conceive, if our Notions of Moral Virtue be to be taken from the Idea we have of the Divine Attributes; 'twill be very hard to prove, in this way of Arguing, that such a Man is, or ought to be Charitable upon Principle; because in his Idea of God, he does not see, that doing Good is any more an essential Perfection of his Nature, than doing Evil. I own, such a Person, setting this Consideration aside, is oblig'd indeed, by the positive and express Commands of God to do Good; but tho' we certainly ought to obey God in whatever he commands, yet where the Command flows from the eternal Reason of Things, and is agreeable to our Moral Notions of Good and Evil, it must be allow'd to give the greater Force and Vigour to our Obedience. And therefore, to preserve in us a good, charitable, and beneficent Temper of Mind towards one another, 'tis highly necessary that we should have great and large Thoughts, and Prayer is apt to produce such Thoughts, of the Goodness and Love of God to us.

So again, Secondly, When a Man presents himself before the most high God for the Pardon of his Sins, 'twill be very natural for him to draw these or the like Conclusions, in favour of those, from whom he has receiv'd any ill Treatment;

That,



That, if it be a glorious Act in the great and holy God to pardon Sin, and receive Sinners to Grace and Favour, 'tis for that Reason, *the Glory of a Man*, as Solomon observes, *to pass over a Transgression*; That at the same Time we are imploring God not to be extreme to mark what is done amiss; nothing can be more reasonable, than that we should proceed by the same Rule of Favour and Equity towards those, who have injur'd us, and rather than carry our Resentments too high, abate much of their Rigour: In a word, *That*, while we are desiring of God to compassionate the Frailties and Infirmities of Human Nature, we should make all candid Allowances for the Defects and Escapes of those who are also Men of like Passions with our selves.

'Tis impossible, one would think, but that these and the like Reflections should often present themselves to the Minds of Men, who truly humble themselves before God, in order to obtain Pardon of their Sins. So naturally, or rather necessarily, shall we learn by frequent Converse in Prayer with the merciful God, to shew our selves merciful; to be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us.

3. Prayer has no less a Tendency to promote that great *Evangelical Duty of Humility*. I do not say, but that we ought to be humble upon a Principle of Natural Religion; tho' if we look into the Heathen Moralists, we shall find their Thoughts upon this Head were not extraordinary: They were so dazled with the bright and more agreeable Idea of Magnanimity, that they could not easily reconcile it, tho' in Truth, they are very reconcileable, with that Humility  
which

which the Gospel expresses by Poverty of Spirit.

*Cicero*, who has said so many fine Things, and in a manner worthy of him, of other Moral Virtues, yet upon all occasions speaks of himself in such Terms, as too plainly discovers he had not so much as a Notion of this Duty, in the Gospel and proper Sense of it.

But the greatest Wonder is, that 'tis no unusual Thing to find Persons professing the Religion of the meek and lowly-minded Jesus, as high in their own Thoughts upon any distinguishing Quality of Mind, or Body, or Advantage of Fortune, as the proud Philosopher, who had heard nothing of the Christian Revelation. Upon this Consideration, I hope, I may be excus'd for observing by the way, that Humility is a Vertue, and a *Christian* Vertue: Tho' my Design, indeed, was to shew, that Prayer is an excellent Means to ingenerate and improve this Vertue; and that both as it contributes to discover to us our Natural and our Moral Defects.

1. When we consider what frail and indigent Creatures we are; and when we appear, as we ought always to do in the Presence of God, with a Sense of our Wants and Frailties about us, what is there that we should value our selves upon? Or rather, How many Considerations are there that may be proper to take us down, and lay the Honour of the greatest of us in the Dust?

'Tis true, when a Man considers the different Capacities or Circumstances of Life, whereby he is distinguish'd; when he looks down upon those below him, or back upon others whom he has left at any great Distance behind him; he is apt

apt to form very advantageous Comparisons in his own Favour, and to imagine himself *Somebody*. But whatever Reasons there may be, as there are a great many, for the different Qualities and Distinctions of Men in Civil Life, yet when they come to present themselves before Almighty God, *before whom*, as the Prophet speaks, *Isa. xi. 17. all Nations are as Nothing; and are accounted less than Nothing and Vanity:* Here one would think all Pretence to superior Merit should be quite out of Place, and all the Ideas of sensible Pomp and Grandeur immediately vanish.

2. Especially, when we consider in the Second Place our Moral Defects, and present ourselves before the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth Eternity, as *Sinners*; who have abus'd his Mercy, despis'd his Goodness, and deserve to feel the Effects of his provok'd and avenging Justice.

'Twas under a Sense of their Unworthiness and Demerits, in these Respects, that Penitents in the first Ages of the Church cloathed themselves in Sackcloth and Ashes, disfigur'd their Faces, and overwhelm'd their Minds in such a manner with Grief, that they refus'd for some Time to be comforted, as if they had degraded themselves so much below Human Nature that they were unworthy to live.

Holy *Job* was under the like Apprehensions, when he declar'd he *abhorr'd* himself, and *repented in Dust and Ashes*, *Job xlii. 6.* And so was Holy *David* when he humbled himself, not only below the ordinary Condition of Men, but of *Animals*: He confesses himself to be a *Worm* and no *Man*. This great and excellent Prince, under  
a Sense

A Sense of his Guilt, and the infinite Purity and Majesty of God, does not disdain to represent himself, as one of the most vile and despicable Insects. Whatever Superiority his Royal Character might give him over his Fellow-Creatures; yet, as a *Sinner*, he places himself in the *lowest* Rank and Order of the Creation.

So great an Influence has Prayer, upon both the Accounts I have mention'd, to make Men humble, that a proud Man can never be supposed to be very Devout; 'tis no extraordinary thing indeed, for Persons of this Character to frequent the publick Worship of God; but that may be done, not so much with a design to do Honour to God, as to set themselves in the Place of God; to draw the Eyes of the Congregation, and to receive the Homage due to him upon themselves.

But whatever may be the Motives to bring such Persons to the publick Worship of God, or however they may seem to join in the publick Prayers made to him; yet they cannot be supposed to Pray to him as a Being of infinite Power and Holiness, but probably as a Being they think to be like themselves, delighting in outward Pomp and Shew, and placing his chief Glory in them; as the *Negroes* are said to Paint their Gods in their own Colour.

'Tis not easy to conceive, I say, how a Person of a proud and haughty Disposition should perform his Devotions to God for any time, at least under any other Notion of him; for if he either consider'd himself as a Creature, or a *Sinner*, such a Consideration would, by frequent and repeated Acts of it, necessarily bring him to think *more soberly of himself, and as he ought to think.*



Thirdly, I shall now conclude, as I proposed, with some proper Motives and Arguments to enforce the Duty of my Text. And here I shall confine my self to the Three following Particulars.

First, The Promises that are so liberally made in Scripture to this Duty of Prayer.

Secondly, The Intercession of Christ: And, Thirdly, The gracious Influences of God's Holy Spirit.

i. The liberal Promises that are made to this Duty in Scripture are so many, that the Time would fail me to enumerate them all; they occur every where in the Book of *Psalms*, and the *Psalmist* takes frequent Occasions from them to inflame his Devotions, and raise them still to a greater Height; particularly, *Psalms* cxlv. 18, 19. to encourage this Duty both in himself and others, he uses several very moving Expressions, all which import the same Thing; *The Lord is nigh unto all who call upon, to all who call upon him in Truth. He will fulfil the Desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their Cry, and will help them.* Our Saviour himself, the more effectually to enforce this Duty, and discover to us the great Importance of it, employs no less variety of different Phrases of the same Signification; *Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you, Mat. vii. 7.* To these two powerful and encouraging Authorities, I shall only add that of the Apostle St. *John*, 1 *Eph.* iii. 21, 23. *Beloved, if our Heart condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his Com-*

# - S E R M O N VIII. 195

*Commandments, and do those Things which are pleasing in his Sight.*

I do not cite these Texts so much to prove, that Christians have a Covenanted Right to make their Requests known unto God, and to be heard, as because they are so full of Consolation to pious and well-disposed Christians, whatever Circumstances of Want or Distress they may be under; tho' indeed, the wisest and best of us have occasion to be stirr'd up and put in Remembrance of what we know already: And tho' it might reasonably be concluded from the repeated Promises of God, both in the Old and New Testament, that there is no Article of Religion which needs less to be prov'd, than that God, thro' the Merits of Christ, has given us a free and favourable Access to him by Prayer; yet, if instead of looking into the Holy Scriptures, we look abroad into the World, and consider how generally this Duty is neglected, one would think the Proof of no Article more necessary.

But I would observe further to enforce this Duty, that the Promises of God made to it, have been in all Ages remarkably made good to holy and devout Persons: Let us consider the greatest and brightest Characters, the Friends of God, in Scripture, and we shall find they were such as gave themselves unto Prayer, and were recommended to the peculiar and distinguishing Favours of Providence by it; nay, there were many of them, whose Prayers were answered in a miraculous Manner, when there was no Human Prospect of delivering them out of their Distress, or procuring them the Blessing they pray'd for. Indeed, many of those great Things,

## 196 S E R M O N VIII

which are ascrib'd, *Heb. xi.* to the Power of Faith, are to be consider'd as the Effects of what the Apostle *St. James* calls the *Prayer of Faith*, Chap. v. 15. and what our Saviour seems to design when he tells us, that *whatsoever his Disciples should ask in his Name, believing, they should receive.* 'Twas in Virtue of this *Prayer of Faith*, that holy Men sometimes wrestled with God so long, that he was pleas'd at last to be overcome with their Violence, and suffer them, as it were, to take Heaven by Force. But,

2. As a further Motive and Encouragement to this Duty, I mention'd the *Intercession of Christ*.

When we consider our Natural, but especially our Moral Defects, What are we, that we should be thought worthy to request any Favour of the Living God? What is Man, sinful Man! That this Great, and Almighty, and Holy Being, should be mindful of him, or the Son of Man that he should regard him? Thus the Heathens seem'd to have reason'd among themselves, and discover'd their Unworthiness to supplicate the Eternal Deity; and therefore they substituted Gods of an inferior Order, thro' whose Hands their Petitions were to pass to him: At other times they had Recourse to Sacrifice, and thought if God would not hear the Prayers of Sinners, yet he might possibly accept the Burnt-Offerings and Oblations wherewith they came before him.

These Notions of the Heathen, concerning the Necessity of intermediate Applications to the most high God, and of Sacrifice, were the occasion of the most gross Superstition, and Inhuman Rites of Worship. Hence it was, that their Altars often flow'd with Human Blood,  
and

and that they gave *even their first-born for their Transgression, the Fruit of their Body for the Sin of their Soul*: Tho' indeed, had we no Revelation, that a Door of Entrance is now open'd to Sinners for approaching the Supreme Deity, when we consider his infinite Majesty, Glory, and Holiness; that as his Creatures, we cannot be profitable to him; and as Sinners have affronted, and thereby separated our selves still at a greater Distance from him; such Considerations, I say, could not but very much discourage us from offering up our Prayers to him: Or, if we should still presume upon the Hopes of his Goodness to pray to him, yet the Thoughts of his Holiness could not but occasion us many misgiving Apprehensions, if the Thoughts of his Justice did not wholly dismay us; of his Justice, to which we cannot but think it reasonable some Satisfaction ought to be made, and to which we are incapable of making any. So that whatever absurd Consequences were drawn from this Notion of a Mediator, and of Sacrifice, yet it appears to have had some Foundation in the Reasonableness of the Things themselves.

This Mediator, which the Heathen sought for in vain, we have found at last in the Person of Jesus Christ, and this Sacrifice in his Death. And upon both these Accounts have the greater Confidence in God, that *if we ask any Thing according to his Will, he heareth us*. And from hence St. Paul, in his Epistle to the *Hebrews*, particularly takes occasion to exhort Christians to this Duty of Prayer: His Exhortation to this Purpose is very full and forcible, Chap. x. 19, 21, 22. *Having therefore, Brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the Blood of Jesus, and having an High-*  
O 3
Priest



128 S E R M O N VIII.

*Priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true Heart, in full Assurance of Faith. 'Tis upon the same Consideration he tells the Ephesians, Chap. iii. 12. that, in Christ Jesus they have Boldness and Access with Confidence, by the Faith of him.*

And yet to support this Confidence, it may deserve to be consider'd a little more distinctly ; *First*, That Jesus Christ intercedes for us in our own Nature: And, *Secondly*, That his Intercessions are always heard.

1. It gives us great Assurance in the Prayers we offer up to God, that Jesus Christ presents them in our own Nature. When at any time we endeavour to lift up our Eyes unto Heaven, and see the Glory of God, how are we dazzled and oppressed with the Brightness of it ? And therefore this, no doubt, was one of the great Occasions of Idolatry, that Men finding themselves unable to keep their Views steady upon infinite Power, Wisdom, and Majesty, or even to raise them to proper and just Notions of these Attributes; they fell from them to visible Representations of God ; and from these, by Degrees, to change his Glory into an Image made like to corruptible Man, and even to Birds and Four-footed Beasts, and creeping Things.

Whether it were one End of the Incarnation of the Son of God (as some have not improperly concluded) to prevent the Growth of Idolatry, I am not, at present, concern'd particularly to enquire : This is very certain, that 'twas highly agreeable to the Goodness of God, and the Infirmities of Human Nature, that our Mediator, should intercede for us in a Human Person.

So

So that, though it gives us great Assurance of the Success of our Prayers, that the Son of God condescended to mediate for us, yet it gives us the greater Boldness of Access to him, that he is also, in Truth, the Son of Man. So the Apostle argues most excellently from the Union of the two Natures in Christ, *Heb. iv. 14, 15, 16.* Seeing then that we have a great High-Priest, that is passed into the Heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our Profession. For we have not an High-Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our Infirmities; but was in all Points tempted like as we are, yet without Sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy, and find Grace to help in time of need. What I would observe further from the Words, is, that the Humanity of Christ does not only in general give us an easier and bolder Access to him, but disposes him to compassionate the Infirmities of the Nature he has assum'd; and whose Frailties, Sin excepted, he experienc'd.

For these Reasons the Apostle proceeds to shew in the next Chapter, that he can have Compassion on the Ignorant, and on them that are out of the Way, ver. 2. This, I say, is a most powerful and persuasive Argument, both to encourage our Addresses to God, and our Hopes of being favourably heard; that, there is one Mediator between God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus; tho' he be really God, yet 'tis by Virtue of that Sacrifice he perform'd in his Human Nature, that he is become our High-Priest, to make Intercession for us. This Man, after he had offered one Sacrifice for Sin, for ever sat down on the Right Hand of God, *Heb. x. 12.*

2. His Intercessions are always heard: The Representations he makes to the Father, in our Behalf, are not like those Requests we make to one another in Favour of our Friends, which may either be refused or granted; but the Prayers which Jesus Christ offers up for us, are in the Nature of a *Petition of Right*, which is only to be made, in order to be receiv'd and confirm'd.

And this Right our Mediator is invest'd with, was founded on the Merits of his Sacrifice. *If any Man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and he is the Propitiation for our Sins,* 1 John ii. 1, 2. Or has this Character of an Advocate conferr'd on him, on account of the Atonement he made for us by his Death. So himself declares, *Luke xxiv. 26. That he ought to have suffered these Things, and so to enter into his Glory.* And the Apostle, speaking of his entering, by his own Blood, into the holy Place, expressly tells us, that, *for this Cause, he is the Mediator of the New Testament.*

So that whatever Promises are made in the Gospel to Penitent Sinners, Christ has a federal Right upon their Prayers to him, to obtain for them; and to assert that Right, he is now sat down on the Right Hand of God, and able to save to the utmost those that come unto God by him.

3. The third and last Motive to Prayer, which I mention'd, is, from the gracious Influences of the Spirit of God. Notwithstanding the ample Promises made to good Men in Scripture, to encourage this Duty, and the Confirmation of those Promises in many signal and surprizing Events of Providence; notwithstanding *the Man* Christ Jesus, now appeareth in the Presence of God, where

where he ever liveth to make Intercession for us, and that all his Desires are always heard; and that too by Virtue of a covenanted and provissory Right: Yet we can have no Benefit from these Considerations, except we be qualify'd and dispos'd to Pray as we ought. But thus to qualify and dispose us, is the proper and standing Office of the Holy Spirit; he it is that enlightens our Minds, and enlarges our Hearts, and purges our Consciences from dead Works to serve the Living God: Indeed, except we make our *Supplication in the Spirit*, 'twould be to no effect, tho' we could be suppos'd to Pray *always, and in all manner of Prayer*.

This therefore is an Encouragement, which gives the greater Force to all the rest I have nam'd; that whereas, by Reason of the Frailty of our Nature, we know not what to Pray for as we ought; we have a divine and supernatural Principle to help our Infirmities, and to inspire us in our Applications to the Throne of Grace, with holy and heavenly Affections. The Scripture teaches us this great Truth, *Ye have received the Spirit of Adoption*, says the Apostle to the Romans, Chap. viii. 15. *whereby we cry, Abba, Father*. With little Variation he repeats the same Divine Encouragement to Prayer, to the Galatians, Ch. iv. 6. *God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our Hearts, crying, Abba, Father*.

To conclude then: If we have so many strong Motives and engaging Arguments to this Duty of Prayer, and such as are peculiar to us from the Divine Revelation we profess to believe; let us consider that 'tis more especially incumbent on us, in the Sense wherein I have explain'd the Words, *To Pray always, and in all manner of Prayer*.  
Let



Let us frequently reflect on the gracious Promises of God, that are made to this Duty, and the Accomplishment of them to good Men; whose Examples are written for our Learning and Instruction; and to the end, that in the same Practice, we might be encourag'd to the same *Hope*.

And to confirm us the more in this Hope, let us look up to Jesus, our only Mediator and Advocate; who in our own Nature, ever liveth to make Intercession to God for us, and has a *Right* to be heard in whatever he intercedes for.

But, *Lastly*, Lest a Sense of our own Unworthiness should still discourage us from addressing our Prayers to the Eternal God; let us frequently reflect on the Assurances, that are given us of a supernatural Grace to sanctify our Devotions, and render them more acceptable to him. Besides those other Passages I have mention'd to this Purpose, let us call to mind that of the Apostle, *Ephes. ii. 18.* where we are told, *That by Christ we have an Access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

All these Considerations, and I pray God we may bear a lasting and powerful Sense of them upon our Minds, are not only proper to encourage our Prayers to God, and to give us Confidence in them; but even to *make us abound in Hope, through the Power of the Holy Ghost, Rom. xi. 13.*

203

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## S E R M O N IX.

The Qualifications of Prayer, with  
respect to the Subject Matter of it.

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I JOHN V. 14.

*And this is the Confidence we have in him, that  
if we ask any thing according to his Will, he  
heareth us.*

**P**RAYER is a Duty of Natural Religion;  
arising from a Sense of our Dependence, and  
the All-sufficiency of that great and glorious Be-  
ing, on whom we depend. We are Creatures,  
and for that Reason dependent; but Experience  
convinces us further, that we are in this present  
State surrounded with innumerable Wants,  
which 'tis not in our own Power to supply; and  
exposed to as many Casualties, which we are as  
unable of our selves to foresee or prevent.

Upon these Considerations, the Light of Na-  
ture has directed Men in all Ages, by Prayer  
and Supplication, to make known their Requests  
unto God; to that Almighty Being, in whose  
Hands are all the Springs of Motion and Action  
in

in the World; and who *does according to his Will in the Armies of the Heavens, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth.*

But tho' the natural Light of their own Minds taught Men for these Reasons to have recourse to God by Prayer; yet it did not so clearly discover to them that he would hear the Prayers of *Sinners*, or grant them the Favours they pray'd to him for. Whatever they might hope from the Goodness and Benignity of his Nature, yet they could not but fear from the Holiness and Justice of it, lest their Sins should *have separated between him and them*, and hindred their Prayers from ascending up to him.

This therefore is one of the peculiar and inestimable Advantages of Divine Revelation, that we are assur'd, if we come qualify'd to pray as we ought, we shall find the Returns of our Prayers, in the Blessings we put them up for.

Many are the Declarations of God both in the Old and New Testament to this Purpose; but the great Assurance, wherewith the Apostle speaks of the Success of our Prayers in the Words before us, has determin'd me in the Choice of them for the Subject of my present Discourse. *This is the Confidence we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his Will, he heareth us.*

Having, in the former Discourse, consider'd the proper Qualifications of Prayer, with respect to the Temper and Disposition of Mind wherewith we ought to pray: I shall take Occasion from these Words,

I. To consider the proper Qualifications of Prayer with respect to the Subject Matter of it.  
And, II. To

## S E R M O N IX. 205

H. To shew how far we may with a humble Confidence rely on the Success of our Prayers, when we are thus qualify'd to offer them.

1. I am to consider the proper Qualifications of Prayer, with respect to the Subject Matter of it.

What we ask, must be according to God's Will: In order to give you a more clear and distinct Notion of this general Truth. I shall lay down the following Rules.

1. Then, what we pray for must be as to the Matter of it innocent and lawful.

2. It must be design'd for innocent and lawful Ends.

3. It must be, according to the ordinary Course and Events of God's Providence, something possible.

4. It ought to tend chiefly to our spiritual Improvement, and Growth in Grace.

*First*, What we pray for, must be, as to the Matter of it, innocent and lawful. To pray that God would prosper us in any wicked Design, or put us in any Method of gratifying some sinful Passions of Pride or Envy, of Lust or Revenge, is not to present our selves as humble Supplicants to his Mercy, but directly to affront his Holiness and Justice. 'Tis to make him a Party, as much as in us lies in our criminal Pleasures and Designs; and to desire that his Providence may be subservient to us in the Ways and Service of Sin.

Yet such are the Prayers of wicked Men, when they desire any thing of God, either unlawful



lawful to themselves, or injurious to others. 'Tis indeed a down-right Contradiction to suppose that we can ask *according to God's Will*, and at the same time to pray that we may be put in a Capacity of acting contrary to his Will: And therefore Holy David declares, *Psalms lxxvi. 18. If I incline unto Wickedness in my Heart, if I have any sinful Object or Design in view when I pray to him, the Lord will not hear me.*

2. What we pray for, must not only be lawful in it self, but design'd for innocent and lawful Ends. As we have no ground to hope that God will hear our Prayers in order to gratify any Inclination to Things directly sinful; neither are we to expect that our Desires should be heard for those Things, which, tho' innocent in their own Nature, yet may be intended as the Means and Instruments of Sin.

For Instance, 'Tis very lawful for a Man to pray that God would prosper him in the just and honest Methods he takes to enrich himself; a prosperous and plentiful Condition in the World, rendring any Person more useful and beneficial in it than 'tis otherways possible for him to be: But then for a Man to desire Riches, only that he may be thought Rich, or in order to gratify his Pride or Vanity, his Luxury or Covetousness; why this is to desire a Blessing directly contrary to the Uses for which God has assign'd it, and for which he is always suppos'd to give it. Let not therefore such a Man, as the Apostle advises in another Case, *think that he shall obtain any thing of the Lord, Jam. i. 7.*

Accordingly, this is mention'd by the same Apostle in another Place, as one great and principal Reason, why the Prayers of Men are not  
always

always heard; that tho' they pray for such things as are good in themselves, and serviceable to many good Ends and Purposes, yet they are *design'd* to serve very different and wicked Ends. *Ye ask,* says he, *and receive not; because ye ask amiss, that you may consume it on your Lusts,* Jam. iv. 2, 3.

3. The Subject Matter of our Prayers must be according to the ordinary Course and Events of God's Providence, something possible.

We must not expect that God will interpose by a miraculous Power to accomplish what we pray for. For Miracles being his strange Work, and which he never employs but to serve some great and general End of his Providence; to desire any thing of him, which is not attainable by human and natural Means, is to desire that he would act by a particular and extraordinary *Will*, against those standing and general Laws, whereby he has decreed to govern the World. And we cannot imagine that he should at every Turn, upon the Prayers of his Creatures, be induc'd to depart from such a Decree, without admitting Consequences, which tend to undermine the Foundations both of natural and reveal'd Religion.

For, if it be reasonable for one Man to desire the Interposition of a miraculous Power in his Favour, 'tis reasonable for another. But, if God should at every Exigence, upon the Prayers of Men exert such a Power, this would render Miracles of no Use to the End for which they are design'd, the Confirmation of his reveal'd Will; because at this rate Miracles would be so frequent, that we should be at a Loss to know what was miraculous, and above the Power of Nature, and what an ordinary Effect of it: And all Things

## 208 S E R M O N IX.

Things would be so confounded, that instead of any clear and convincing Arguments for the Truth of Divine Revelation, we should want one of the sensible Proofs of a Deity and a Providence (those fundamental Articles of Natural Religion) from the Beauty and Order of the Universe.

If any Man therefore imagine (and it is observ'd that Men in Extremities are most apt to entertain such Imaginations) that God will some way or other do Wonders for him, and change the Course of Things in Heaven and Earth in favour to him; he ought to look upon such a Thought, as proceeding from the last Degree of Human Presumption, heightened by diabolical Illusion.

For indeed, that Men are capable under Circumstances of great Distress, or in the Pursuit, as they apprehend them, of great Designs, to form such chimerical Thoughts of the Intentions of Providence towards them; and that this is a proper Opportunity instead of the Deity, for the Devil to interpose, appears from the Method which this great Deceiver took to tempt our Blessed Saviour in the Wilderness. He knew the Foible of Human Nature; but, as is probably concluded, did not at that time know that the Son of God had assum'd it. But observing that our Lord, after fasting so long, had a great and strong Inclination to gratify his Natural Appetite of Hunger; he thought he had a fair Opportunity of pushing his Temptation, when he advis'd him that he would work a Miracle for his own Relief, by the Conversion of Stones into Bread.

But

But the Holy Jesus, who afterwards wrought so many Miracles agreeable to the Design of God, for the general Good of Mankind, and the Confirmation of his Holy Religion, rejected the Proposal with a just Disdain; and would not after all the Expectations he might have from his Father's Love, desire him to be at the Expence of one Miracle for his own *particular* Support.

But I would observe further, that tho' according to the general Event of Things in this Life, what appears desirable to us may be very possible; yet with respect to the Circumstances we are under, it may be really impracticable. And in this Case, tho' the Thing we desire may be in it self consider'd both lawful and good for us; yet we cannot have the Confidence the Apostle here speaks of in our Prayers for it. As, when two or several Persons desire the same Thing, 'twould be a Contradiction to suppose that each of them could have a confident and well-grounded Assurance of the Success of their Prayers; for tho' they ask nothing, but what absolutely speaking is according to God's Will, yet the Thing relatively speaking cannot be according to his Will, because he cannot *will* Impossibilities.

Yet our Prayers even on such Occasions, if we pray as we ought, shall not return empty; God hears them, and has innumerable Ways of answering them, tho' not perfectly in our own Way. And probably this may be one Reason, why God, in the Words of my Text, is rather represented as hearing our Requests, than granting them. For tho' according to the Phraseology of the Scriptures, when God is said to hear our



Prayers, it does in effect import that he will answer them; yet this Expression leaves more Scope to his Wisdom and Goodness, as to his Methods of answering them. And if he give more than either we desire or deserve, tho' in his own due Time and Method, certainly we can have no reason to complain.

4. What we pray for ought to tend chiefly to our spiritual Improvement and Growth in Grace; then we may have the strongest Confidence that we ask according to God's Will, when we desire nothing so much as that he would enlighten our Minds to know, and dispose our Hearts to do his Will.

We may indeed pray for temporal Blessings, and 'tis many times our indispensable Duty to do it, under an entire Resignation to the Wisdom of God, and with this Condition, that he sees what we pray for really good and convenient for us. And therefore with respect to temporal Things, 'tis not enough that we desire nothing that is sinful in it self, or as an occasion of gratifying our sinful Passions; but we must not absolutely desire any Advantage of this World, tho' we have no ill Designs, but according to the present Disposition of our Hearts, so far as we are able to judge, many good ones to serve by it.

But then, as to the Matter of our Prayers, for spiritual Grace and Improvement, the Case is different. There can be no Time wherein the illuminating and sanctifying Graces of the Holy Spirit are not necessary for us; or wherein our Desires of them, if they be really sincere, are not according to God's Will. So that when we pray for any spiritual Blessing, if we are in other respects qualify'd to pray, we may come boldly,  
and

# SERMON IX. 211

and in full Assurance of Faith, to the Throne of Grace, as knowing that what we pray for is at once most agreeable to the Will of God, and necessary to the Supply of our greatest Wants. If the Prayers of good Men are sometimes heard by God for the temporal Comforts and Conveniences of Life; How much more, as our Saviour argues on another Occasion, *will God give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it?* Luke xi. 13.

But I proceed to shew more particularly in the

Second Place, How far, when we pray according to God's Will, we may with a humble Confidence rely on the Success of our Prayers.

It seems the more necessary to consider this Matter distinctly, from a Difficulty which is apt to arise in the Minds of very good Men: They observe on the one Hand, that the Promises of God made in Scripture to this Duty of Prayer are very ample and extensive; they find on the other Hand, when they pray to God with the greatest Ardor, and the most inflam'd Affections, and for such Things as appear most agreeable to his Will, their Prayers are not answer'd. This perplexes them extremely; and not experiencing the Accomplishment of God's Promises, they seem at a Loss to account for the Truth and Faithfulness of them.

But this is a dangerous and delusive Way of Reasoning, and which ought to be taken great Care of, as it tends to promote one of the greatest and most artful Designs of the Enemy; which is to make Men distrust God, and the Revelation he has made of his Will to them in the Holy Scriptures.

## 212 S E R M O N IX.

1. To prevent therefore the Danger of any such Temptation, we ought to lay it down in the First Place, as a certain and undeniable Truth, that whatever God has promis'd *absolutely*, he will faithfully, and to all Intents and Purposes perform; *For he is not a Man that he should lye, neither the Son of Man that he should repent: Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* Numb. xxiii. 19. But then,

2. We are to consider, that where the Promises of God are made to us, upon certain Conditions or *Reserves*, we have no Right to the Performance of them any further than is agreeable to the Reason of such Conditions. Thus, when 'tis said, *If we ask any thing* according to God's Will, *he heareth us*; his Will must be understood as being regulated by his Wisdom and Goodness.

Now God may have very wise and good Reasons, and in the Event highly advantageous to us, for denying us those Things which we desire most importunately of him; and that upon these Two obvious Considerations.

1. That God alone perfectly knows what would be the Consequence of his granting us our Requests. The Grant of them might draw a train of unhappy Events after it in the natural Order of Things, which we do not foresee; and which perhaps might involve us in much greater Evils than we at present complain of, or than the Happiness we can propose to our selves in the Enjoyment of what we desire, will compensate for. This Consideration alone, if we duly attend to it, is sufficient to convince us, that God may have many Reasons worthy of his Wisdom

## S E R M O N IX. 113

Wisdom and Goodness; and tho' unknown to us, yet such as we should entirely acquiesce in, did we really know them, why he delays or denies to Answer our Prayers. But,

2. Another Reason hereof may be this: That the Heart of a Man is very deceitful; it is not easy for him at all times to discover the secret Insincerity which lies at the Bottom of it.

He may propose nothing further to himself than an innocent Use or Enjoyment of the Blessing he beseeches God for; and according to the present Disposition he is in, he may apprehend no manner of Danger from it. But God, *who is greater than his Heart*, sees the contrary; and therefore of very Faithfulness denies him the Desire of it.

Both these Considerations are proper to shew us our greatest Happiness in this World; in that our Affairs are not in our own Disposal, but in the Hands of a God hearing Prayer, who always *knows*, and always *wills* what is really best for us.

Now if God answer our Prayers, as to the general Reason and Spirit of his Promises, certainly we can have no just Pretence to call his Truth or Veracity in Question, tho' what he Promises, is not for our own Benefit always, in the literal Sense, and immediately made good to us.

I shall now make a useful Improvement or Two of what has been said, and so conclude. And,

1. If Prayer be a Means of giving us Access to God, and procuring for us so many and great Blessings, 'tis just Matter of Reproof to Christians especially, that this Duty is so generally



neglected among them. I do not hereby suppose, that there is any Christian who does not sometimes pray; for he that can live in a total habitual Neglect of this Duty, must, one would think, have first renounced his Christianity: But my Meaning is, that Christians are not altogether so frequent, or perhaps so fervent in the Performance of this Duty, as might be expected from the high and glorious Privileges of it.

This Judgment appears to be the less Uncharitable, because we find it so difficult many times to persuade Men to attend the publick Worship of God; for there is very little Reason to hope, that they, who upon trifling, and sometimes perhaps sinful Pretences, will excuse themselves from coming to the Prayers of the Church at the stated Seasons, and especially on the Lord's Day: There is very little Reason, I say, to hope, that such Persons will serve God very devoutly in Private.

I do not say but that there may be some justifiable Occasions to detain People from the publick Worship; or that upon such Occasions they may not be well and piously employ'd. But this I say, that if such Occasions be not real, but only pretended, as God knows they often are, such Persons may without Breach of Charity be suppos'd either not to pray at all, or not according to God's Will, as they are sensible at the same time, they are guilty of the Breach of a known Duty, directly contrary to his Will.

There is this difference indeed between private and publick Prayer: Private Prayer is an Address to God for the procuring some Blessing we want, or the Removal of some Evil we suffer

fer; 'tis an Acknowledgment that we entirely depend on God, that we live, and move, and have our Being in him, and that his Providence ruleth over all: But in publick Prayer we acknowledge his *eternal Power and Godhead*, in a Way more honorary to him, and more edifying to others. And therefore the Honour and Glory of God, and his publick Worship, are Expressions in Scripture signifying the same Thing. And the Place of his Worship is expressly stil'd the Place where his Honour dwelleth; that is, where Men publickly assemble to do him Homage, and acknowledge him to be the great Creator and Governor of the World.

Will not then a great Degree of Charity be requir'd, to make a Man believe that they, who live to Appearance without God in the World, or seldom repair to his publick Worship, will much concern themselves about the private Duties they owe to him?

And if this be one way, as I'm afraid it will be found, of judging of the general Neglect or Indifference of Men as to this Duty of Prayer: Consider, I beseech you, how shameful and scandalous a Reproach such a Neglect must needs be to those, who, besides the natural Motives to this Duty, are under so many Engagements to it from the reveal'd Will of God; whereby *are given to us*, in the Performance of it, such *exceeding great and precious Promises*.

2. What has been said affords good Men Matter of great Consolation, even when they do not find the Return of their Prayers in the Blessings they pray for. God intends the very Denial of their Requests to them for Good; how desirable soever they may apprehend such and

such a Blessing to be, yet his Thoughts are not as their Thoughts, he sees at one View the entire Connection of Causes and Events, and in that View discovers that we often should find the Obstruction of our Happiness both here, and perhaps for ever, in the Accomplishment of what we desire.

Let us then, if ever we perceive our selves dissatisfy'd, or under any trouble of Mind, because God does not answer our Prayers, remove all distrustful Thoughts of his Veracity, with these or the like Considerations: Either that God, whose Judgments are true and righteous altogether, does not see what we pray for expedient for us; or that there is some secret Indisposition in our own Hearts that renders us unfit for it: Either we desire something which 'tis not agreeable to the Wisdom or Goodness of God to grant; or which 'tis not proper for us, in the present State and Condition we are in, to receive.

The former of these Considerations will support us with Constancy and Resolution under the greatest Evils of this Life, as knowing that our Interests are deposited in the Hands of a wise and good God, whose Dispensations therefore we ought to be satisfy'd with, tho' he may not think fit to grant us what we pray for: And the latter of these Considerations is a very powerful Motive to make us try and examine our own Hearts, to see if there be any way of Wickedness in them, and to correct it.

*Thirdly and Lastly*, I shall conclude with a Word or Two of Exhortation, and in such a manner, as may serve to bring to your Remembrance  
what

what I have said concerning those Qualifications of Prayer, which fell under our present Consideration.

And *First*, If we can only hope for the Success of our Prayers when the Subject Matter of them is agreeable to God's Will; let us never request any thing of him but what we certainly know to be lawful and right; let us not think that any Design of procuring the sinful Gains or Pleasures of this World, or that any mischievous Imaginations, with respect to others, should prosper upon our Prayers to God, to such wicked and ungodly Ends; let us reject all Motions of this kind, at the Moment we discover them, with the utmost Horror and Detestation.

2. Tho' what we pray for be good and lawful in it self, and serviceable to many good and excellent Ends, yet let us not think we shall obtain any thing of the Lord, if we do not really, and from the Bottom of our Hearts, design to employ it to those Ends; but would only put our selves in a way of executing some criminal Project, or of *making Provision for the Flesh to fulfil the Lusts thereof*; which is, in effect, to desire God to interpose by his Providence, in direct Opposition to the Order and Methods of his Grace.

3. Let us be no less cautious how we tempt God by Praying, that he would succeed us in any chimerical Designs, or such as according to the general and standing Methods of his Providence are impracticable. Let us repel all such Temptations, as our Blessed Saviour did those of our great Enemy, and who places his chief Strength in them, with Abhorrence. But,

4. What



4. What I would in the last Place exhort you to, is, that you would above all things beg of God, in your Prayers, the Assistance of his Holy Spirit, that you *may grow in Grace, and the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* As to the Blessings of this Life, there needs no Exhortation to those, who pray at all, to pray for them; and such Prayers are by no means to be condemn'd: Yet the Providence of God dispenses temporal Blessings so promiscuously to wicked and good Men, that no Judgment can be form'd either of his Love or Hatred from them. They are Blessings when well employ'd, and then only; but whether we shall employ them well or ill depends upon the good Disposition of our Hearts, which yet are so deceitful, that a Man must be perfectly acquainted with himself, who knows whether he shall be a Wise Man or a Fool, in a prosperous Fortune.

Never then let us be importunate in our Prayers for temporal Blessings; and for this very Reason, because they are temporal. If we do at any time pray for them, let us do it with an entire Resignation to the Will and Wisdom of God. But those spiritual Favours, which *endure to everlasting Life*, and are necessary to prepare and train us up for it; these we may implore absolutely, and *ought* to implore them in the most fervent and affectionate Manner: In truth, Piety and Religion are necessary to sweeten even temporal Enjoyments to us. For let us have all our Hearts can wish in this World, if that were *possible*, yet without the Grace of God, we could never enjoy any perfect Ease or Repose in our Minds. The Reproaches of an evil Conscience, and the Apprehensions we should be

## S E R M O N IX. 219

be under of the Wrath of an Avenging and Almighty God, would be continually troublesome and uneasy to us.

I shall conclude all, with one of the Excellent Collects of our Church.

*Let thy merciful Ears, O Lord, be open to the Prayers of thy humble Servants; and that they may obtain their Petitions, make them to ask such Things as may please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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T O

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To the Right Honourable the  
Earl of *THANET*.

My LORD,

**T**HE Subject of the following Discourse, renders it very proper to be address'd to Your Lordship; for certainly, the best and most persuasive Method of Instruction, is to bring the Example and the Rule together.

But, My Lord, besides the Propriety of this Address in general, I have a very particular Inducement to it, from what I owe to a noble Instance of that Beneficence, which is here recommended; tho', 'tis possible, Your Lordship may have forgot, what I shall always think my self oblig'd to remember.

My LORD,

As I have not the Honour to know You personally, I shall not presume to enlarge in Your Character; tho', if it be true, that they must be Persons of great Merit, whom all the World speaks well of; I do not want a good Foundation for such an Attempt, were I in other Respects equal to it.

But, My Lord, what I design at present, is not to pursue the common Method of Dedications, but to embrace so just and inviting an Occasion, of acknowledging my self,

My LORD,  
Your Lordship's  
most Humble,  
most Oblig'd,  
and Obedient Servant,

*Ric. Fiddes,*

# SERMON X.

## The Nature and Measures of Christian Beneficence.

HEB. iii. 16.

*But to do good, and to communicate, forget not;  
for with such Sacrifices God is well-pleased.*

**T**HE Author of this Epistle supposes those he writes to, so thoroughly instructed in the great Duty of Christian Beneficence, that he does not think necessary to enforce it directly by any positive Precept, but only to remind them of their Obligations to it; *to do good, and to distribute, forget not*: Our Attention need only be awaken'd, to give us strong and lively Impressions of what we owe to one another, in all good and charitable Offices.

But as the wisest and best of Christians have many times occasion to be put in Remembrance of what they know already, that they may be *stirr'd up* more effectually to the Practice of it, I shall take leave to discourse upon these Words, in the following Method.

I. I shall



I. I shall shew what these Expressions, *To do good, and to communicate*, more particularly import: And,

II. Upon what Accounts these are Sacrifices so acceptable and *well-pleasing* to God.

III. I shall endeavour to conclude, with some proper and seasonable Observations.

*First*, I am to shew what these Expressions, *To do good, and to communicate*, more particularly import. I begin with the first of them.

1. Then, *to do good*, is to do whatever may tend to promote the Good and Happiness of our Neighbour; to prevent any Peril or Misfortune he may be expos'd to, or to deliver him out of any Circumstances of Adversity, which he may be in. The Goods or Evils we are capable of in this World, either respect our Spiritual or our Temporal State: Those which respect our Spiritual State, being of the last Consequence, and on which an Eternity of unspeakable Happiness or Misery depends; the most noble and generous Instance of doing Good to others, is to contribute what we can to make them *good*, to prevent their falling into Sin, or to recover them, when fall'n.

'Twas upon this Design of doing Good, in saving us from our Sins, that the Son of God took upon him the Nature of Man, and the blessed Name of *Jesus*, Mat. i. 21. And in Imitation of this great and glorious Example, the Duties of *Beneficence*, as they respect the Spiritual Advantage and Edification of our Neighbour, consist in our charitable Addresses to them, according to their different *Spiritual* Wants or Defects. The proper Office of Charity to the Ignorant,

is to Instruct them; to those that are in Error, to bring them to the *Acknowledgment* of the Truth; to such as are under any perplexing Doubts or Terrors of Conscience, to direct and comfort them; and to others again, who go on impenitently, and without Remorse, in a sinful Course of Life, to admonish and rebuke them. The Apostle seems to comprehend all these, and if there be any other good and religious Offices we owe to our Neighbour, in that one Direction, *1 Theff. v. 14. Now we exhort you, Brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient towards all.*

These are general Rules of our Conduct, in relation to our Christian Brethren; they are not peculiar to those, tho' they certainly oblige them in a special manner, who have the Cure of Souls more immediately committed to them: But, I say, every Person, without Distinction, is oblig'd by the Laws of Christian Charity, as he has Opportunity, to do all the Good he possibly can, in these Respects, to all Men.

And, indeed, the meanest, the most illiterate of Men, have, (if they will but make use of them) frequent Occasions of promoting the Spiritual Good and Edification of those with whom they converse. Religion carries so great Weight and Authority along with it, that whatever is said with a real Design to promote it, (be he who he will that says it) cannot but command our Regard and Attention.

But if Men, by Reason of some natural Defects, may not be in so general a Capacity of doing Good by their Advice or Reproof; yet there is no Man, but is capable of being one way or other Exemplary in his Life and Conversation;

on : And the Influence of a pious and good Example is very prevalent, whoever it be conspicuous in ; and therefore, in the Holy Scriptures, a *holy*, and *chaste*, and *good* Conversation is so strictly, and indifferently enjoined all Christians.

There are Duties, indeed, proper to every State and Condition of Men in this World. The more shining and active Virtues are for the Powerful and the Great ; but a lower Sphere of Life, is that wherein the more ordinary and general Rules of Christianity are chiefly exemplify'd ; and those that move in the lowest, are capable in many Respects, of shewing the Power and Efficacy of Religion, by a suitable and submissive Behaviour.

And this probably was one of the Reasons, why the Son of God chose to make his Appearance in the World in such low and mean Circumstances ; *Namely*, that he might have an Opportunity of exercising the more common Duties of Christianity, and that by this Means his Example might be of a more general Influence and Extent.

I am the more particular in observing these Things to you, to shew, that there is no Man, but God has put him in one Capacity or other, upon one Occasion or other, of *doing Good*, in promoting the great Ends of Piety and Religion, and the Edification of others. Not one of you, but what, if he be sincerely Pious, may, and will find many Opportunities to this End ; for, as the Apostle, speaking of the chief Duties and Ornaments of the Christian Life, argues in general, *If these Things be in you, and abound, they make you, that ye shall neither be barren*

*nor*

*nor unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Pet. i. 8.*

But, as it may possibly happen, if through some natural Defect, or unhappy Circumstances of Life, Men may be *less* capable of promoting the Spiritual Good of others, either by their Advice or Example; yet, this is what every one of us can, and ought to do frequently, in order to so good and desirable an End: We can put up our Prayers to God, for those Spiritual Graces our Christian Brethren may stand in need of; we may beseech him, *to bring such as have erred, or are deceived, into the way of Truth; to strengthen such as do stand, to comfort and help the weak-hearted, and to raise up them that fall.*

I do not know whether this Duty of Intercession be so generally practis'd, or duly consider'd as it ought, even by those who frequent the most excellent Service and Prayers of our Church, which it makes up so great a Part of. But this is certain, that God would never have enjoin'd us by so many repeated Precepts, to pray for one another, nor have further recommended this Duty by so many Examples in Scripture, if our Intercessions tended only to the greater Pomp of Religion, and after all had no real Force or Efficacy in them.

As we are therefore commanded to *strive together*, in our Prayers, for one another; and as this has been the Practice of the holiest and best of Men, we may be assur'd, that such Prayers are both acceptable to God, and beneficial to others. Here then is a large Field of *doing Good*, and in the best and most effectual manner, opened to us, and to every one of us. No Man can excuse himself from a Method of doing Good,



and the greatest Good he is capable of doing, which 'tis in the Power of all Men to employ.

2. To do good also respects the Temporal Advantage and Welfare of our Neighbour. And here again, the several Acts of our *Beneficence* are to be suited to his several Exigencies; if the Circumstances he is in require our Advice, we ought to give it him in the best manner we can; if our Assistance, we ought to discover a Readiness to gratify him in any reasonable Request, and even to prevent it, where Modesty, or some other Reasons of Decency may be suppos'd to hinder him from making it.

These, indeed, are Acts of Beneficence, which arise from a natural Greatness and Generosity of Mind, and cannot well fail of exerting themselves in all Persons who merely consider what is owing to the *Image* of God, and the Dignity of Human Nature; and therefore one would think 'twere needless to put Christians in Mind of their Duty upon this Head; the very Genius and Design of whose Religion tends to improve Human Nature in all its proper and generous Inclinations. Yet Reflections of this kind will be always useful, while they are not without their Application; that is, so long as Experience convinces us, that there are Persons in the World, who profess themselves *Christians*, of so fordid, so selfish, and insensible a Temper, that they have need a Man should teach them again, even the very first Principles of *Humanity*.

But because I would speak more largely of that particular Branch of Beneficence, which is here express'd by *Communicating*, I shall content my self, at present, with this general and comprehensive Rule of doing Good, with re-  
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spect to the *Temporal* Advantage of others; That whenever we may be capable of contributing to their Ease or Comfort, their Health or Safety, their Reputation or Interest, we have so many proper and moving Occasions of being beneficial and necessary to them. Tho' I cannot, indeed, conclude what I have offer'd as a short Explication of this Duty of doing Good, better than with the Rule of the Apostle himself, and that both with respect to the Temporal and Spiritual Benefit of others; *As every Man hath received the Gift, whether of God's Holy Spirit, or providential Dispensations, even so minister the same one to another, as good Stewards of the manifold Grace of God,* 1 Pet. iv. 10.

2. *To Communicate* forget not; *κοινωνίας ἡ ἐμ-*  
*νασάδα.* The Word imports something in com-  
mon, which we partake, or cause others to par-  
take of. And in the Infancy of the Church,  
the Distributions which were made to the Ne-  
cessities of the Saints, were so great and liberal,  
that Christians might then, in a very proper and  
strict Sense, be said to *communicate*, or to impart  
what they had to others in such a manner, as  
if they had no separate Interest or Propriety in  
it themselves. The Apostle expressly tells us,  
That *they who believed had all Things common*, Acts  
ii. 44. So that probably 'tis in this Sense we are  
to understand, v. 42. That *the Apostles continued*  
*in Fellowship*, τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, that is, in bringing their  
Effects into one Common, or Joint-Stock, for  
the Good of the whole Church, and of every  
particular Member.

But tho' this Community of Goods was at  
that Time, by reason of the general Distress,  
adviseable, and a noble Evidence of the Power

and Prevalency of the Christian Religion over that selfish Temper which so commonly governs Mankind, and is the chief Cause of the Corruption that is in the World : Yet the Reason, from the persecuted and generally distress'd State of Christians at that Time, now ceasing, a Community of Goods founded upon that Reason, is no longer Obligatory, or perhaps, indeed Lawful ; because 'tis highly probable, a great many wise and good Ends of Providence, in putting Men under a Necessity of Labour and Industry, of improving Arts and Sciences, would be hereby frustrated ; and in a corrupt and dissolute Age, all Order and Distinction among Men would be utterly confounded.

Yet, so far, I conceive the Reason of that Extensive Charity, whereby the first Christians distinguish'd themselves, does oblige all succeeding Christians, that they ought to have a tender and compassionate Sense of the Sufferings of their Brethren in the Lord ; and if they are not bound in the strictest Sense to *communicate*, yet certainly they are under an indispensable Obligation, as they have Opportunity, liberally to distribute ; and to this end to *lay by them in store*, for good and charitable Uses, *as God hath prospered them*, 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

To communicate therefore, or distribute, is to set apart some Proportion of those good Things the Providence of God has blessed us with, to the Benefit and Relief of others : We ought to give more liberally, indeed, out of our Abundance ; but in extraordinary Cases 'tis incumbent on us also to do something, with the poor Widow in the Gospel, out of our own Penury : Nay, he that is acted by a truly Generous

rous and Christian Spirit, will not only consider what he owes to the pressing Wants, but what is likewise owing to the Birth, to the Education, to the Character, or Quality of the Person, in Circumstances of Distress; and upon these Accounts he will be induc'd to extend his Liberality. And tho' these are Considerations, I say, which more peculiarly respect Persons of Condition, yet the poorer sort of People are not to think themselves exempt from this Duty of distributing, especially in Cases of Extremity: They ought, on such Occasions, to consider, not so much what they can do *with convenience* to themselves, as what the crying and present Necessities of their Brethren require to be done.

Those, indeed, that flow in Wealth and Plenty, are in such Cases under an Obligation, from which they can by no means dispense with themselves, without renouncing at once all Principles of Humanity and Religion: That 'tis incumbent upon such Persons to exercise a more ample and diffusive Charity on all Occasions, is evident from several Commands of God in Scripture. But lest the Authority of those Commands should not be of Force enough to persuade, Men are encourag'd to obey them upon the Prospect of a glorious and eternal Reward. I shall mention but that one famous Passage to this Purpose, 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19. *Charge them, saith the Apostle, that are Rich in this World, that they do good; that they be Rich in good Works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up for themselves a good Foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal Life.*

Yet Christians in meaner Circumstances, even those who subsist by their Labours, and with



some Difficulty support themselves, or their Dependants, are oblig'd, upon uncommon and pressing Exigencies, to contribute to the Relief of their distress'd Brethren. So the Apostle requires, that instead of having Recourse to any fraudulent Arts or Practices for a Livelihood, a Man should rather labour with his Hands the thing that is good, that he may give to him that needeth, Ephes. iv. 8.

Having thus explain'd the Meaning and Import of these Expressions, *To do Good*; and *to Communicate*, I proceed to shew,

Secondly, In the Second Place, why doing Good, and *Communicating*, are Sacrifices so acceptable and well-pleasing to God.

And here I shall more particularly confine my self to that particular Branch of Beneficence, which is express'd by *Communicating*. And I reduce the Reasons of that distinguishing Mark of God's Favour, which, in the Words of my Text, and other Places, is set upon this Duty, to the following Heads.

First, By Acts of Charity, under this Notion of it, we imitate God in one of the glorious and moral Perfections of his Nature.

Secondly, We do Honour to his Providence.

Thirdly, We discover the Power our holy Religion has over us, and the Sincerity of our Love to God; And hereby,

Fourthly, We act suitably to one of the Prime and Essential Inclinations of Human Nature.

1. By beneficent and charitable Actions, we imitate God in one of the glorious and moral Perfections of his Nature: That Perfection, which he seems himself to exalt above all his other Attributes, and without which they would  
render

render him rather an Object of Terror than Love to us: His Power and Omniscience, his Wisdom and Omnipresence, might serve to fill our Minds with great and astonishing Ideas, or perhaps, extort from us such a pompous and servile kind of Worship, as the *Indians* are said to pay their Demons; but without the Goodness of God these Attributes would make no kindly Impression on our Hearts, or give them any Motions of Desire towards him.

For to what end should we have an Inclination to unite our selves to a Being that is indeed wise and knowing to Design, that it is infinitely powerful, and always present to effect our Happiness; yet without Goodness to make us actually Happy: We shall rather be dismay'd under the Apprehensions, lest having no good Intentions towards us he may possibly employ these other Attributes in rendering our Condition the more Wretched and Unhappy.

'Tis Goodness therefore, with such other Perfections as are inseparable from it, which renders any Object lovely and desirable; and therefore God so frequently in Scripture represents himself to us under the pleasing and bright Idea of this Attribute. Thus he proclaims his Name in the most solemn and engaging manner, *Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6. The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in Goodness and Truth.*

Now the Goodness of God being that Attribute which he so much delights to honour, whereby he describes his Nature to us, and wherein he *abounds*: 'Tis Pious to believe, that such Acts of Goodness as we poor Creatures may be capable of, are in the very Nature and Rea-

son of them well-pleasing to him, as they are a faint Transcript of that Divine Copy he has set us of his own infinite Goodness, in the glorious Works of Creation and Providence.

As God condescends to take upon him the Character of a Father, and the proper Human Passions arising from that Relation, the more we endeavour to be like him, if we may argue from the Effects of one of the strongest Passions in Men, the more he will like us, and be pleas'd to see his Image renew'd in us, especially in that part of it, whereby, in the Holy Scriptures he more particularly discovers a Desire to distinguish himself.

And therefore, 'tis a very powerful Argument our Saviour makes use of from God's paternal Relation to us, to excite us to all proper and possible Acts of Beneficence; *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect,* Matth. v. 48. 'Tis plain, from the Context, and the Scope of our Saviour's Discourse, that by being perfect we are to understand being of a good, merciful, and charitable Temper; but probably he employ'd the Word *perfect* to express such a Temper both in God and Man, to shew that the greatest Perfection of Human Nature, and if there be one Perfection greater than another in the Divine, consists in this noble and excellent Disposition.

2. *Hereby we do Honour to the Providence of God.* The present State and Condition of Things in the World, require that Men should be under different and unequal Circumstances of Life: A great many wise Ends of Providence are serv'd in this World, by the Distinction of High and Low, Rich and Poor. Were Mankind upon a Level,

Level with respect to their Fortune, or outward Condition of Life, they would be in danger of becoming so, more generally than they are, with respect to the inward Capacity and Improvement of their Minds; a stop would be put to a great many useful Arts and Inventions and other Effects of Study and Industry, which contribute so much to the Support, and Convenience, and Happiness of Human Life.

But tho' for these, and many other wise Reasons, God has so order'd it, that the Rich and the Poor should meet together in this World; that while some Persons live in all the Ease and Plenty, and Splendor of a great Fortune, others should be hard put to't for the necessary Supports of Life; yet Persons of a superior Condition must not therefore think themselves exempt from all Obligation to contribute to the Relief of the Indigent: For probably this, among other Reasons, may be one, why God has put so great a Number of Men under Circumstances of Want and Distress, that those, who are in a better Capacity, may have constant and proper Occasions of exerting themselves in all the good Offices of Humanity, and Love, and Charity, which are the brightest Ornaments of Human Nature; and that others, seeing these their *good Works*, may be more effectually excited to glorify God.

But whether this be one Reason, that the Condition of Men in this World is so unequal, and that *ye have the Poor always with you*: 'Tis certain, we ought to entertain more large and worthy Thoughts of the Providence of God, than to imagine, that he has given Life and Being to so great a Number of Intelligent Creatures, with an Intention to deprive them of the ordinary  
Means



Means of Living in the World. And yet 'tis certain on the other Hand, were it not for the Private Charities of well-dispos'd Persons, a great many People would be in danger, without a Miracle, of Perishing for want of the necessary Supports of Life, notwithstanding the Publick Provision made by the Laws for them; which is seldom so considerable, as not to require the Charity of private Persons to make up the Defects of it. And yet (which ought to be particularly consider'd by those who are well and charitably inclin'd) perhaps the greatest Objects of Charity are such, as not being able to overcome the Respect they suppose owing to their Birth or Education, or Credit they have formerly liv'd in, are willing to suffer the greatest Extremities, rather than put themselves or Families upon the Publick Charity; and the Number of such Persons is greater, than perhaps is commonly imagin'd.

But tho' God can interpose by an immediate and miraculous Power, to supply the Wants of Mankind, when all Human Means fail; yet 'tis not so agreeable to the settled Order and Methods of his Providence to do it: And therefore, in such Cases he has deputed the Rich, as his Stewards, to lay out what he has entrusted them with, in charitable Uses; in clothing the Naked, and feeding the Hungry, and giving them their Meat in *due Season* and Measure. And 'tis incumbent on the Rich, as ever they hope to give a good Account of their Stewardship, to do Honour to their great Lord and Master, by carefully considering and pursuing these Ends of the *Trust* repos'd in them.

And

And therefore, I conceive 'tis in this Sense we are to understand those Words of Solomon, Prov. xiv. 31. *He who honoureth God, hath Mercy upon the Poor*; i. e. he who contributes, according to his Abilities, to the Relief and support of those, whom the Providence of God may be thought to have left more naked and expos'd, does a real Act of Honour to his Providence, by making up, as much as in him lies, the seeming *Inequalities* of it, which necessarily arise from the present State and Condition of Things in this World.

On the other Hand, as 'tis observ'd in the former Part of the Verse, *He that oppresseth the Poor, reproacheth his Maker*; i. e. he who by Violence, or the Arts of unjust and indirect Gain, takes Advantage of the Necessities of other People, so as to render their Condition still more necessitous and disconsolate; why such a Man does what he can to bring dishonour on the Providence of God, as if he had abandon'd all Care of his Creatures, or made no proper and competent Provision for them.

3. By Acts of Beneficence, we discover the Power which Religion has over us, and the Sincerity of our Love to God.

The Laws of our holy Religion are so admirably suited to the Passions and Inclinations of Human Nature, that 'tis hard in many Cases to discover, whether the Duty we perform be done with a sincere Intention to please God, or to gratify some Motion of Self-Love. I might confirm what I here observe by innumerable Instances; but there is one in particular which I'm afraid will come home to the Consciences of many of us,

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'Tis this: Preaching, both as 'tis a proper and natural Means of Instruction, and Instituted by God to this End, is what Christians ought to give Attendance to: Again, As it is a Means of gratifying the natural Thirst of Men after Knowledge, or their Curiosity, and in some Respects, perhaps, their Vanity; we find that the most dissolute Persons frequently, and with great shew of Zeal, will repair to hear Sermons, without any visible Effect of what they hear upon their Conduct; which could not be at least so ordinarily, and for a Succession, perhaps, of many Years, if such Hearers were not influenc'd by other Motives than those which arise from a true Sense of their Duty, and a sincere Obedience to the Ordinance of God.

Thus 'tis in other Cases; we imagine we are mighty good and religious, when at the same time, perhaps, we are only following our own Inclination: And considering how apt our Hearts are to impose upon us, there is some Difficulty in distinguishing upon this Point; but the best Way to come to certain Knowledge, whether we do any thing out of pure Love to God, is to practise such Duties as have something in them contrary to the Motions and Maxims of Self-Love. This is the most sensible Argument that we can give to our selves, or others, that our Hearts are right with God, and that Religion has in truth some Power over us.

Of this Nature are the Duties of Christian Beneficence; wherein we are willing to deny our selves, and to depart, in some measure, from our own Interests, in regard to the Necessities, and, in some Cases, to the Conveniencies of other People. Now such Sacrifices, no doubt, where,

wherein we make a Sacrifice of our own Inclinations, as they proceed from a true Love of God, are at once most acceptable to him, and worthy of him.

But in truth, tho' Acts of Charity may in many Respects interfere with the Maxims of Self-Love, and seem to cross the Designs of Avarice and Worldly-mindedness; yet it will appear under my next and last Particular,

4. That they are agreeable to one of the prime and essential Inclinations of Human Nature.

God has implanted in our very Frame and Make, a compassionate Sense of the Sufferings and Misfortunes of other People, which disposes us to contribute to their Relief; so that when we see any of our Fellow-Creatures in Circumstances of Distress, we are naturally, I had almost said, mechanically inclin'd to be helpful to them. The Apostle significantly expresses our pursuing this natural Inclination, by *putting on Bowels of Mercy*; and as all the Actions of Nature are sweet and pleasant, so there is none which gives a good Man a greater, or more solid, or lasting Pleasure than this of *doing Good*; Which is an Argument, that the Principle from whence this Action proceeds, is very deeply rooted in our Nature; and that a due Season of those Calamities we see other Persons under, will not, *cannot* content it self with a bare fruitless and formal Compassion, with saying unto them, *Be ye warmed and filled*, and putting them off with such like *impracticable* Advice. No, where Men follow Nature in those tender Motions of it, which incline them to Acts of Kindness and Charity, they will not be easy, except they lay hold of the proper Occasions of exerting



exerting them: As we read, when our Blessed Saviour was at any time mov'd with Compassion, he improv'd it to an Opportunity of doing some great and seasonable Good, even tho' he was at the Expence of a Miracle to do it.

So strongly is this natural Tenderneſs, where Nature is not one way or other corrupted, apt to operate in us; and which therefore, from the *Greeks*, we very ſignificantly render *Philanthropy*; from the *Latins*, *Humanity*; and which in the Language of our own Nation, and with a particular Reſpect to the Genius of it, we expreſs by *good Nature*. And tho' there is ſome Difference in the Expreſſions, yet they all ſuppoſe Compassion ſo deeply rooted in Human Nature, and ſo eſſential indeed to it, that Men cannot divest themſelves of it, or forbear the proper Acts ariſing from it, without degenerating into Brutes and Savages.

One Reason why God has given us theſe ſtrong and natural Sentiments of Compassion, 'tis highly probable may be this, That Man, of all other Beings upon Earth, ſtands in the greateſt Need of the Help and Aſſiſtance of his Fellow-Creatures; for whereas Nature, when ſhe brings other Creatures in the World, puts them in a readier Way of making ſome Proviſion for themſelves, and cloaths them with Offeſſive or Deſenſive Armour; Man is born more naked and expoſ'd, and 'tis a conſiderable Part of his Life before he can do any thing towards his own Support; and even in his full Strength and Vigor, he would at the beſt but paſs his Time very ill, were it not for the many Comforts and Conveniencies which he reaps from Society.

It has been objected indeed against the Wisdom of Providence, that Man, the most Noble and Excellent of all other visible Creatures, is, for so long a Time, not only an unprofitable, but a troublesome Part of the Creation: But perhaps God has order'd it so, both to humble the Pride of Human Nature, (the great and most general Foible of it), by shewing us, what weak and insignificant Creatures we were during so considerable a Period of our Lives; and also to dispose us, as soon as we are capable, to make some suitable Return to the Society we were born into, for the Care it took of us, when we could take none of our selves. As God has made Man a sociable Creature, 'twas a very wise Design of his Providence to train him up in such a manner for Society, as might give him the strongest Impressions of all the Duties of Humanity and Respect, which he owes to it, and wherein the Peace and Happiness of it principally consist.

The Argument I would form from what has been here observ'd, is this, That *doing Good* cannot but be acceptable and well-pleasing to God, as it is agreeable to one of the most Strong, and Noble, and God-like Inclinations he has implanted in Human Nature, and as it serves withal to many wise and good Ends of his Providence, in relation to Society.

And now, after all these Considerations, and many more which might be urg'd from the Nature and Genius of our Holy Religion, to shew the Excellency of this Duty of Beneficence, and how proper it is to recommend us to the Love and Favour of Almighty God; one would think 'twere altogether unnecessary to exhort Christians

tians to it: It might rather be thought proper on the other Hand, as to this Particular, to dissuade them from being *Righteous over much*; it having perhaps been the Case of some very good Men, tho' such Instances are not common, to have exceeded in the Measures of their Charity: And if there be a pious and pardonable Excess in any Virtue, 'tis certainly in this; and yet, after all, it must be granted, that this Duty is not so generally practis'd, or in that ample Extent, which might be expected, both from its own Merit, I would be understood in the sober Sense of the Word, and the Distinction which God has in so many places put upon it.

*Thirdly*, I shall therefore in the last place, and in pursuance of the Method propos'd,

First, Observe to you that there are Defects in the Charity of Christians, with respect to this Duty of *Communicating*; for I still confine myself to that.

Secondly, I shall observe what I take to be one great and general Cause of those Defects. And,

Thirdly, What may be the proper Method of removing it.

I. I am to shew that Christians are in Fact defective in this Duty of *Communicating*. I do by no means here intend to detract from that Spirit of Charity which is gone out into the Nation, and has laid so many good and well design'd Foundations for the Subsistence, the Instruction, and Employment of poor People, whereby they are put in a Capacity both of being useful to themselves and the Publick; 'Tis probable, that so general a Sacrifice ascending up continually as a Memorial before God, may be

# S E R M O N X. 241

be one Means of averting his just Wrath and Vengeance against a sinful Nation ; and the Reason why, while some Neighbouring Countries have felt the dismal Effects of War and Famine, and a devouring Pestilence, we live in all the Enjoyments of a healthful Air, and a plentiful Soil ; and tho' engaged in a bloody and tedious War abroad, are and have been all along prevented at home with the Blessings of Peace.

Yet there seems, with all Submission, to be one Defect, and a very considerable one, in the Publick Charity ; and that is with respect to poor Prisoners for Debt. Several Attempts have been made, and a Blessing, no doubt, is upon the Head of those that make them, towards repairing this Defect ; but have been by one Means or other hitherto frustrated. What Arguments have been made Use of to frustrate them, I do not know ; but it may be very much suspected, they are not to be examin'd nicely by the Rules of Christian Charity, or indeed the common Maxims of Humanity.

Ingenious Men will find something to say upon any thing ; but 'tis really Matter of Wonder, that a wise and understanding People should hit upon no Method of punishing those, whose only Crime perhaps is their Poverty, but by disabling them from being serviceable to the State, or capable of making any competent Provision for themselves or their Dependants.

If this be an Error in Politicks ; 'tis a much greater Breach of the Laws of our Holy Religion to put Men under a Necessity of perishing, for Want of the ordinary Supports of Life. And yet when poor People, who subsist merely by their Labours or Occupations, are expos'd to



inhuman Prosecutions (I shall presently give the Reason why I call them so) and rendered Incapable by their Confinement of doing any thing towards a Livelihood, there is ordinarily no competent Provision for their Support. And were it not that God supports them by a Providence, to the Apprehension of those who have had the Opportunity of observing it, next to miraculous, to say no more, they must necessarily perish.

But tho' God has declar'd, and on many occasions evinc'd the Truth of it, that Man does not live by Bread alone; yet as Food and Rayment are the ordinary Means of Subsistence to Men, to deprive any Person of them, or the Means of acquiring them, is a Cruelty, which, if the Malice or Revenge of private Christians should prompt them to inflict, yet one would think the publick Laws, which are always suppos'd to be without Passion, should never tolerate, especially in a Nation, whose general and peculiar Character is good Nature.

For indeed 'twould be a greater Mercy to condemn People to immediate Death, than to put them under Circumstances wherein they want the necessary Supports of Life. Wherein, besides that Want, they are many times in a very unhappy Case, with respect to the State of their Souls, and the Opportunities of composing their Minds to the Duties of Religion.

As to those Persons who are in a Capacity of paying their just Debts, they are no ways concern'd in what I say, because the Restraints they are under are voluntary, and the Effect of their own Choice, and they have wherewith to support themselves under them. But indeed the

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# S E R M O N X. 243

Desire of Liberty is so strong and natural, that this cannot well be suppos'd a Case which frequently happens; but if any such Persons may, as possibly there may be found, who have so little Taste of one of the greatest Blessings in this Life, their Case is very different from that of a Person, who by one Accident or other is really disabled from paying his Debts, and who has no other Prospect of paying them, but by following his proper Business or Employment.

It seems, I humbly conceive, a Defect in the publick Charity, that there is no Provision made either for the Prevention of such an inhuman Usage, as I am speaking of, or the Relief of those who are so used.

And I call it an *inhuman Usage*, because 'tis really so in the Judgment of our Blessed Lord himself, upon that vile and obdurate Wretch, who found Mercy at the Hands of his Master, *forasmuch as he had not to pay*; but had no Compassion on his Fellow-Servant, who was under the same Circumstances of Insolvency, and implor'd his Patience for the same Reason, *Math. xviii. 32, 33.* But, I say, how insensible soever private Persons may be of the Duties of Christian Compassion and Charity, it were to be wish'd some Means might be found out, if not to let the Oppressed go free, yet in some measure at least to undo their heavy Burthens, and to alleviate the Want of one of the greatest Comforts of Life, by providing them in a more liberal and Christian Manner the necessary Supports of it.

I do not think my self at all oblig'd to Apologize for what I have here said, when I consider that our Blessed Saviour makes it one of the

grand Articles of his Enquiry at the Day of Judgment, how we have perform'd our charitable Offices towards Persons under those unhappy Circumstances I have been considering. However Men may excuse themselves, as perhaps there are few who consider their Duty in this respect as they ought, from *visiting* such Persons, yet certainly it cannot be foreign to a Discourse of Charity to express a Christian Tenderneſs and Regard for them.

If there be any Defects in the Publick Charity, 'tis to be fear'd they are more general in the private Offices of Life. Instead of that noble and generous Spirit Christianity is apt to inspire, and which ſo remarkably discover'd it ſelf in the firſt Ages of Christianity, and contributed ſo much to the Growth and Propagation of it; it muſt be own'd a Spirit of Pride, Envy, and Self-Interest reigns more generally in the World, and that we every where meet with the Effects of it. It was anciently a Proverbial Saying among the Enemies of our Holy Religion; *See how theſe Chriſtians love one another.* But now ſay they, and God knows there is too much Reason for the Reflection; *See how theſe Chriſtians circumvent and ſupplant, bite and devour one another.*

But what is ſtill more ſurprizing, there are thoſe who profeſs themſelves Chriſtians, that imagine the Arts of fraudulent and unjuſt Gain, of Violence and Oppreſſion, are very agreeable to the Nature of their Calling: So that tho' they ſleep not till they have done Miſchief, they imagine they have done nothing amiſs; nothing that their Conſciences ought to challenge or reproach them for; nothing at leaſt but what is authorized by common Practice and Example

# S E R M O N X. 245

on the like Occasions. Hence it is that they seek to cover the most unchristian Designs with the Character of shrewd Men; and successful Villany goes for no more with them than good Management.

But not to run too far in such an easy Transition, from the Defects of Charity among Christians, to Acts of Violence and Injustice; I shall proceed,

2. To observe what I take to be the great and general Cause of those Defects. There is no Man who has the least Sense of Religion, but is convinc'd that Charity to the Poor is a Duty. This Conviction is so general that the most sordid and avaricious think themselves concern'd on one occasion or other to do something in a charitable way. And tho' what they do bears no manner of Proportion to what they are capable of doing, or ought to do; yet still 'tis an Act of Charity, and that they conceive is sufficient.

This Error proceeds, no doubt, at the Bottom from Self-love, which is so apt to corrupt the Heart, and blind the Eyes of Men; yet 'tis probable a great Number of Christians are impos'd upon by it, because they have not in the Gospel any particular or stated Rules as to the Proportion of their Charity, with respect to their Fortune or Estates. And indeed in those many excellent Discourses which we have upon the Duty of Charity to the Poor, this Matter is seldom set in so clear a Light as might be wish'd. And on that account, probably, those Discourses, with all their Beauty and Justness of Thought, lose much of their Force.

In order therefore to remove this common Obstacle to the Charity of Christians, I would,

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3. And



grand Articles of his Enquiry at the Day of Judgment, how we have perform'd our charitable Offices towards Persons under those unhappy Circumstances I have been considering. However Men may excuse themselves, as perhaps there are few who consider their Duty in this respect as they ought, from *visiting* such Persons, yet certainly it cannot be foreign to a Discourse of Charity to express a Christian Tenderness and Regard for them.

If there be any Defects in the Publick Charity, 'tis to be fear'd they are more general in the private Offices of Life. Instead of that noble and generous Spirit Christianity is apt to inspire, and which so remarkably discover'd it self in the first Ages of Christianity, and contributed so much to the Growth and Propagation of it; it must be own'd a Spirit of Pride, Envy, and Self-Interest reigns more generally in the World, and that we every where meet with the Effects of it. It was anciently a Proverbial Saying among the Enemies of our Holy Religion; *See how these Christians love one another.* But now say they, and God knows there is too much Reason for the Reflection; *See how these Christians circumvent and supplant, bite and devour one another.*

But what is still more surprizing, there are those who profess themselves Christians, that imagine the Arts of fraudulent and unjust Gain, of Violence and Oppression, are very agreeable to the Nature of their Calling: So that tho' they sleep not till they have done Mischief, they imagine they have done nothing amiss; nothing that their Consciences ought to challenge or reproach them for; nothing at least but what is authorized by common Practice and Example

on the like Occasions, Hence it is that they seek to cover the most unchristian Designs with the Character of shrewd Men; and successful Villany goes for no more with them than good Management.

But not to run too far in such an easy Transition, from the Defects of Charity among Christians, to Acts of Violence and Injustice; I shall proceed,

2. To observe what I take to be the great and general Cause of those Defects. There is no Man who has the least Sense of Religion, but is convinc'd that Charity to the Poor is a Duty. This Conviction is so general that the most sordid and avaricious think themselves concern'd on one occasion or other to do something in a charitable way. And tho' what they do bears no manner of Proportion to what they are capable of doing, or ought to do; yet still 'tis an Act of Charity, and that they conceive is sufficient.

This Error proceeds, no doubt, at the Bottom from Self-love, which is so apt to corrupt the Heart, and blind the Eyes of Men; yet 'tis probable a great Number of Christians are impos'd upon by it, because they have not in the Gospel any particular or stated Rules as to the Proportion of their Charity, with respect to their Fortune or Estates. And indeed in those many excellent Discourses which we have upon the Duty of Charity to the Poor, this Matter is seldom set in so clear a Light as might be wish'd. And on that account, probably, those Discourses, with all their Beauty and Justness of Thought, lose much of their Force.

In order therefore to remove this common Obstacle to the Charity of Christians, I would,

R 3.

3. And

3dly. And in the Conclusion of all, observe to you, in what Measure and Proportion 'tis ordinarily incumbent on them to *Communicate*.

To say that you ought to extend your Charity according to your several Abilities, is a very true Rule, and agreeable to that of the Apostle, *1 Cor. xvi. 2.* That every Man should lay by him for good Uses, as God hath prosper'd him. But how true soever this Rule is, 'tis too general to affect those who are not very well dispos'd to receive it. We may observe the most dull and stupid of Mankind are sometimes ingenious enough in excusing themselves from what they have no mind to, or what is contrary to their prevailing Inclination. When therefore a wealthy Person, whose predominant Passion is Covetousness, is told that he ought to proportion his Charity to his Estate, he easily deceives himself in what he is willing to be deceived; and measures that Proportion not according to what he really possesses, but his imaginary Wants, or a thousand suppos'd Casualties which may happen to impair his Estate, or perhaps reduce him to Poverty. And while he is under these Apprehensions, as 'tis natural for all covetous Persons to be, he thinks it highly reasonable that his Charity should begin at home.

It must be own'd, that Persons who are not altogether given up to a Spirit of Covetousness, are forward enough to admit any Pretence that may favour the Maxims of Self-Interest, or excuse them from those Duties which in any kind seem to oppose it.

Till therefore we can shew Men that they ought at least to set apart some certain Proportion of their Estates to charitable Uses, we may convince

# S E R M O N X. 247

convince them indeed (but who is not convinc'd of that already) that Charity to the Poor is a Duty? But it will require something more to persuade them to exercise their Charity in a proper and becoming Manner.

I shall therefore humbly endeavour to assign such a Proportion of Charity, as Christians at least ought not to fall short of, whatever Latitude there may be in exceeding it. Under the Jewish Dispensation, besides other ordinary and extraordinary Charities, there was an express Command of God, that every third Year a Tenth Part of the Increase of that People should be appropriated to charitable Uses, *Deut. xiv. 28, 29.* This, reducing the Proportion, amounted to a Thirtieth Part of their yearly Income. Now it seems highly reasonable, that where any Duty is incumbent on us, but the natural Light of our Minds does not clearly direct us as to the particular Measures of it, there we ought to follow a Divine Precedent, if we can find any such, founded on the reveal'd Will of God.

Thus 'tis a Dictate and Duty of Natural Religion that Men should set apart some proper and stated Time for the publick Worship of God; but why one Day in Seven, rather than in Six or Eight, should be observ'd to this End, Human Reason does not seem capable of resolving with any certainty: In this Case, how can we take a wiser and better Method than to regulate ourselves by the *positive* Institutions of God?

This Rule I take to be universally binding, where the Commands of God are of moral but indeterminate Obligation, and the Reason of them of general Extent.



That 'tis matter of Moral Obligation to Men to contribute to the Relief and Support of the Poor, will not be deny'd; all the Difficulty lies here, whether there were not some Reasons peculiar to the State of the *Jews*, upon which God, among other Charities, might assign them the Proportion I have mention'd?

To which I Answer: That whatever Reasons there were for extending this Duty of Charity among the *Jews*, there are stronger Reasons to oblige us Christians to a more extensive Measure and Degree of it; and that both from the Nature and Genius of the more *perfect* Dispensation we live under, and the Terms wherein our Spiritual Relation to one another is express'd.

This Relation, and the Duties arising from it, are very particularly explain'd and insist'd upon in the 13th Chapter of the First Epistle to the *Corinthians*. Our Union with Christ, and with one another, by the vital Influences of his Holy Spirit, is Illustrated by that of the Natural Body with its Head, which is made by one Life or Soul animating and informing the Whole: And the Duties arising from this Union, are represented by that mutual Tendernefs and Sympathy wherewith our Bodily Members are affected towards one another, whether in a State of Ease, or of Pain and Suffering. Thus the Apostle argues, that the several Members of Christ's Mystical Body ought to have the same Interests and Affections, whether of Joy or Grief: For, says he, *Whether one Member suffer, all the Members suffer with it; or one Member be honoured, all the Members rejoyce with it: Now ye are the Body of Christ, and Members in particular, ver. 26, 27.*

Can there be any Reason suppos'd from the State of the *Jews*, consider'd either as a Political Body or Religious Society, which will carry the Obligation to all mutual and charitable Offices, so high as this Argument, were we to pursue it in all its just Consequences?

For these Allusions are not Chimerical, or made use of by the Apostles merely to amuse us, but have a real Foundation, and ought to be consider'd more perhaps than generally they are; as laying an invincible Engagement upon us to all proper Acts of Compassion, Kindness and Condescension to our Brethren in the *Lord*.

When therefore, I say, that this Command of God to the *Jews*, concerning the Proportion of their Charity, does oblige us Christians, all I intend is, that 'tis so far a Rule to us that we ought not to fall short of it; but how far we ought to exceed it is a Matter of another Consideration, which I must leave to your own Prudence, and those great Sentiments wherewith Christianity is apt to inspire all those who duly consider the Nature and Design of it.

What I contend for is, that Regard being also had to the other Charities commanded the *Jews*, the Thirtieth Part of the clear yearly Increase of all Men, where Reasons of strict Justice do not otherwise indispensably require, is the lowest Proportion of their Charity that can be assign'd, and that he is worse than a *Jew* who does not assign it.

But still, I think, all Christians ought, and every good Christian will, if he can, exceed this Proportion. When our Saviour tells us, *He came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it*; he can by no means be suppos'd to lessen our Obligation to  
any

any Moral Duty, either as to the Kind or Degree of it, but to raise it higher. So again, when he tells us, *That except our Righteousness exceed the Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* By Righteousness, 'tis highly probable, we are not only to understand the Practice of Religion in general, but more particularly that Duty of Christian Beneficence I am speaking of, and which is frequently in Scripture express'd by Righteousness: It cannot be suppos'd that Notion of the Word Righteousness should be excluded by our Saviour, wherein it was so commonly us'd and understood among those whom he spoke to.

So likewise, when he tells his Disciples in another Place, *A new Commandment I give unto you, that you Love one another;* 'Tis certain, that this Command, as to the Nature of it, was not New, but antecedently founded both in natural and reveal'd Religion: We must therefore understand it as New, with respect to the Measure and Degree of it, requir'd under the Christian Dispensation, and the greater Obligation we are consequently all of us under to be more Liberal in our charitable Offices and Distributions.

The good and merciful God therefore grant, that his Grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually given to all good Works, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

# SERMON XI.

That Miracles are now neither neces-  
sary to the Conviction of Unbelie-  
vers, nor the Conversion of Sin-  
ners.

Now, say they (for I shall set the Argument  
for them in the best Light I can) If the Chris-  
tian Religion be true and from God, and the  
Belief and Practice of it be true, it is  
known this first, that there shall come in the  
last Days Scoffers, walking after their own  
Lusts,  
And saying, Where is the Promise of his com-  
ing? For since the Fathers fell asleep, all  
things continue as they were from the Begin-  
ning of the Creation.

**T**HE Force of what is here objected by the  
Scoffers, is commonly suppos'd by Inter-  
preters, to lie in this; That whereas Jesus Christ  
had threatned to come and take Vengeance on  
the obstinate Jews, he had not as yet appear'd in  
any visible or remarkable Manner to that End.  
But tho' I do not wholly exclude this Sense, the  
Words, I conceive, are rather to be explain'd  
concern-



concerning *Scoffers* in general, in all succeeding Ages of the Church; for so the *last Days* is a known Expression in Scripture to denote the whole Period of the Christian Dispensation. Besides, it could not be truly said at any time before the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, that *all Things continued as they were from the beginning of the Creation*; because there was a Succession of Miracles in the Church to that time, and indeed for a considerable while after.

I shall therefore consider the Words, as a standing Objection of *Scoffers* or *Free-thinkers*, according to the modern and softer Appellation, against the Truth and Authority of the Christian Religion.

Now, say they (for I shall set the Argument for them in the best Light I can) “ If the Christian Religion be true and from God, and the Belief and Practice of it so necessary as is pretended to Salvation, Why does not God, who as the Gospel affirms, willet all Men to be saved, interpose by a continued Series of Miracles to remove the Causes of Infidelity and Corruption among Christians? On the other Hand we see nothing now-a-days come to pass, but according to the establish’d Laws and Order of Nature, which it receiv’d in the first Formation of Things. The present Age produces none of those wonderful and supernatural Events which are reported to have been done by Jesus Christ and his Apostles, and other Fathers of the first Centuries; neither have we authentick Records of any such things done for several Ages past. We do not, in particular, now hear illiterate Persons speaking in Variety of Languages, or any

“ Lan-

“ Language they were never taught ; neither do  
 “ we see the Dead restor’d to Life again. In a  
 “ word, we discover nothing of that miraculous  
 “ Power upon which the Truth of Christianity  
 “ is suppos’d to be founded, and which could not  
 “ but give greater Force and Efficacy, were it  
 “ still continued, to the Laws of it ; and there-  
 “ fore the Continuance of such a Power appears  
 “ highly necessary to us, both in order to the  
 “ Conviction of Unbelievers, and the Conver-  
 “ sion of Sinners.

This being an Objection which at once may be thought to affect the Credit of our Holy Religion, and the Wisdom and Goodness of God, as if he had not afforded Men proper and sufficient means for the Belief and Practice of it ; I shall directly, in answer to what is objected, make it my Business to shew,

- I. That Miracles are not now either necessary to the Conviction of Unbelievers ; or,
- II. To the Conversion of Sinners. And,

I. Miracles are not now necessary to the Conviction of Unbelievers. ’Tis sufficient that we are assur’d there was a Time when the Christian Religion was confirm’d by numerous and undoubted Miracles ; and that Jesus Christ and his Followers, could not have done those things, which the Scriptures ascribe to them, if God had not been with them.

Now we have all the Evidence that can be desir’d of the Truth of those Facts, and more especially of such of them as were miraculous, that are recorded in Scripture : For the Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, were publish’d at  
 a Time

a Time when those Miracles they relate were fresh in the Memory of Men; at a Time when it mightily concern'd the great Enemies of Christianity, the Jews in particular, to disprove them; and when, if they had not been true, they might easily have found Means of Disproving them. But this, knowing it a vain and fruitless Attempt, they were so far from going about, that in order to invalidate the Testimony of our Saviour concerning himself and his Doctrine, they had recourse to another Method, and which in effect does really confirm the Truth of what he taught. They suppos'd, and do many of them to this Day, that he wrought his Miracles by *Belzebub, the Prince of Devils*; which is a tacit Confession at least, that the miraculous Works ascrib'd to Christ were true in Fact. But this appearing an impious and groundless Pretence; they afterwards fram'd a Story, That *Jesus* going one Day into that Part of the Temple, where the sacred and ineffable Name of God was repositd, he found means to discover and take it away with him, and by Virtue of it wrought all his Miracles.

As to the former of these Suppositions, our Saviour himself observ'd and refuted it by an unanswerable Argument, *Matt. xii 25, 26, 27*. And as to the latter of them, supposing it really true, it makes nothing against the Truth of the Christian Religion, but rather tends to the greater Confirmation of it; as it is a plain Acknowledgment, that *Jesus* was endued with a Divine Power, whereby he was enabled to do things, which no Human Power could do; but how he came by this Divine Power, is not so much a Question; as whether it were consistent with the

the Wisdom of God to grant it any Person in order to confirm a false Testimony? For, if this might be admitted, Miracles could be of no Use to confirm the Truth of any Divine Revelation whatever; because we could never be assur'd whether the Doctrines confirm'd by them were true or false. And therefore it can be no more suppos'd that God should empower any Person to set the Broad Seal as it were of Heaven to a Lye, and confirm a human and false Testimony by a miraculous Power, than that he should be the immediate Author of a Falshood himself.

The Miracles then, which were done by Jesus Christ, having all the Marks of real and true Miracles, were done by a Divine Power. And we having all the Evidence that Matters of Fact, done at a Distance, are capable of, and which is sufficient to convince all rational and well-dispos'd Persons, if the most authentick and best attested Writings in the World, and even the Confession of Adversaries be a proper Means of Conviction; what necessity is there that God, in order to convince Infidels, should on every Occasion interpose by a miraculous Power? Seeing, if Men will make use of their Reason and Understanding, they may be satisfy'd of the Truth of the Miracles already recorded in Holy Writ; but if they will not, neither would they be convinc'd by any new Miracles, but still see them, as the *Jews* did in the Time of our Saviour, with a Veil over their Eyes.

For 'tis plain from the Case of that obdurate People, that whatever force Miracles may have in them to persuade, yet they do not irresistibly compel the assent of Men to the Truths they are de-



design'd to establish. And therefore the Apostle assigns it as the Reason why our Saviour *did not many mighty Works* among the People of *Nazareth*? *Matth*, xiiij. 58. That they were under great Prepossessions against him on the Account of his mean Birth and Education; which 'tis highly probable the Miracles he could have wrought, would not have been able to remove. *St. Mark* indeed tells us, that our Saviour could do no mighty Work there, *Chap*. vj. 5. But this is to be understood according to a usual way of speaking in the World; as when we say, we cannot do, what we apprehend cannot be done to any good effect; or what we can propose to our selves no certain or probable End in doing. So that 'tis reasonable to believe that those Prejudices which hindred the *Jews*, and still hinder Unbelievers from examining the Proofs, and assenting to the Truth of the Christian Revelation, would not be remov'd, tho' a Miracle were wrought before their Eyes in Confirmation of it.

Those who contend for the Continuance of Miracles, in order to evince more effectually the Truth of reveal'd Religion, proceed upon one of these Suppositions: Either that 'tis necessary every particular Person should for his own Satisfaction be one time or other of his Life an Eye-witness of some miraculous Fact; or else, that once at least in every Age and Nation God should exert his Omnipotence, and the Miracle be committed to some publick and standing Record, for the Information of those who were not Eye-witnesses of it.

As to what is here requir'd in the last Place, 'tis obviated by saying, that we have all the Evidence

dence of the Miracles recorded in the Gospel, that any Man, who is not an Eye-witness of it, can have of a Miracle done in his own Age or Nation, if we will but examine the Proofs of them; but if we will not, our Negligence cannot be pleaded, and to be sure will not be admitted by God in excuse of our Incredulity. Besides, 'tis below the Majesty and Wisdom of God, when he has afforded Men the ordinary and sufficient Means of Conviction to alter the establish'd Laws of Nature, in order to gratify a vain and idle, and after all, perhaps, fruitless Curiosity.

Upon the former Supposition, Miracles would be so frequent that they would become of little Force or Consideration. Atheistical Wits would invent *Theories* to account for them upon Philosophical Principles, and resolve them into the Mechanical Powers of Matter and Motion; and most Men would after some time of their being rendred so familiar, look upon them not as the extraordinary and immediate Effects of God's Power, but of some natural and necessary, tho' unknown Cause, whereof they might yet form plausible Conjectures.

For Instance; of all other Miracles, the Resurrection of one from the Dead, both in the Reason of the Thing it self, and the Judgment of that Holy Spirit wherewith the Scriptures were dictated, is proper to awaken the Attention of Men, and make a powerful Impression on their Minds. But if it were ordinary for the Dead to appear again in their proper Shape, and with all the proper Appetites of a human Body, so as to eat and drink with those they appear'd to; there is no doubt but every Free-thinker

to a Man, would set his Invention at work to shew how far a strong seminal Heat might contribute to form the same Parts of the Body into the same Order again after their Dissolution; by which means we might expect to see how far the chymical Argument so often made use of, from the Re-production of Plants, might be improv'd; and whether it could be carry'd so far as to discover not only the Possibility of the Resurrection, but the several Springs and Efforts of Nature towards it.

And thus, in all Probability, it would be with respect to other Miracles: Were they more frequent they would be of less Force and Efficacy to persuade, and serve only to put Men upon forming nice Schemes to explain the Appearances of them.

This is certain, that the Effects which Miracles have upon Men, depend upon a good, docile and obedient Temper of Mind. He that is in this good Disposition, needs no further Evidence of Miracles for his Conviction; but he that is not, would not, 'tis likely, be convinc'd by them, tho' we should suppose them more frequent. But whether he would or no, there is no Reason to expect that God should alter the Uniformity of his Conduct, and have recourse to extraordinary Methods, where the ordinary are sufficient.

Yet it may deserve to be further consider'd: That besides the Evidence of Miracles, whereby both our Lord and his Apostles confirm'd the Truth of their Doctrine, they also seal'd it with their Blood. This was one End of our Lord's dying, as himself confesses, for us, *that he might bear witness unto the Truth*, 1 John xviii. 37. Accordingly

cordingly he is said, *1 Tim. vi. 13.* before *Pontius Pilate*, to have witnessed a good Confession: That is, to have given one of the most strong and unexceptionable Arguments in the World of the Truth of his Doctrine, and the Innocency of his Design, by confessing himself to be the Christ, the King of *Israel*, when he knew his Confession would cost him his Life.

And as little Reason have we to suspect the Probity and Veracity of the Apostles of our Lord; who, for the sake of the Truth, suffer'd almost all the Miseries and Calamities of this Life which Human Nature is capable of suffering; and at last took their Death upon it, that what they taught was the Truth: And therefore gave the World all the Satisfaction that could be desir'd, that they did not act upon any Motives of Vanity or Interest, or any other worldly Views whatever; but out of a full Conviction of the Divine Authority of our Holy Religion, and the Truth of those Facts, upon which the Proofs of it were founded. For tho' wicked Men may endeavour to promote and propagate an Imposture at the Hazard of their Lives, where they can propose to themselves any great and considerable Advantage by it, yet no Man will expose himself to certain and unavoidable Death, in Confirmation of what he knows, or cannot but know, upon the least Enquiry, to be false. Yet, if we could even suppose any Persons desirous to throw away their Lives after so absurd and unaccountable a Manner; this can by no means be suspected of the Apostles of our Lord, who of all Men living were the least form'd for designing or carrying on an Imposture; and who, throughout the whole Course of their Lives, dis-



cover'd a great Plainness and Simplicity of Manners, and in the Discharge of their Ministry appear all along to have spoke forth *the Words of Sobriety and Truth.*

Now here, I take it, we have a considerable Addition to the Evidence even of Miracles themselves, in order to ascertain us of the Truth of our Holy Religion. Whatever Difficulties Men may raise (and what is there which ingenious Men cannot find Difficulties in) concerning the Nature and Properties of true Miracles; yet when those very Persons, who were empower'd to work such Miracles, suffer Death in Confirmation of the Doctrine they were design'd to establish; this, I say, must be admitted as an additional Argument at least both of the Truth of such Miracles, and the Veracity of the Persons by whom they were said to be done.

Now the Degrees of Persuasion, we know, are always stronger in proportion to the Credit and Validity of the Evidence; and these it must be own'd, for the Reasons I have mention'd, are plainly on the Side of the Proofs we have already concerning the Truth of Christianity, above what can be expected from any bare Miracle or Miracles, which the Unbeliever himself could desire to be done.

But if Miracles are not necessary to the Conviction of Unbelievers; may they not,

2. In the *Second Place*, be necessary to the Conversion of Sinners? Or to reclaim those who already believe, from *walking after their own Lusts*, and bring them to Repentance? I Answer again in the Negative; and you have the Reasons why I do so in the following Propositions.

1. That

1. That the same Motives, which now induce Men to put off their Repentance, would in all Probability be as prevalent, tho' we should suppose Miracles more frequent.

2. Tho' it should be granted that a Miracle might for the present make some powerful Impression on the Mind of a Sinner, who resists the ordinary Means of Grace; yet there is no reason to expect that such an Impression would be of any long or lasting Continuance.

3. Tho' what is here asserted could not be made appear from probable Reasons and Arguments; yet 'tis confirm'd by Experience and undeniable Matters of Fact. And,

1. The same Motives which now induce Men to put off their Repentance, would, in all Probability be as prevalent, tho' we should suppose Miracles more frequent. The Impenitence of Sinners does not ordinarily proceed from their Ignorance of the Nature or Necessity of Repentance, but from the prevailing Force of some present Temptation, or evil Habit, and the Designs of repenting hereafter; but neither of these Obstacles to the Conversion of a Sinner would be remov'd by the Method here under Consideration.

1. For, in the *First Place*, we are, or ought to be, all of us sensible, that the Power of resisting Temptation, and mortifying our criminal Passions, is not to be ascrib'd to any natural Strength or Capacity in our selves, much less when by a long and habitual Course of Sin we have super-induc'd still a greater Weakness and Debility upon deprav'd Nature; but, I say, the Power we have over our sinful Inclinations and Habits, is owing, tho' in Concurrence indeed with our

own Endeavours, to a Principle of Divine Grace; to a holy Frame and Disposition of Mind ingenerated in us by the Spirit of God: Whose Heavenly Assistances those Persons who resist the ordinary Means of Grace have the least Title to, tho' a greater Measure and Degree of them are requir'd in order to *their Conversion*.

Indeed, if a Miracle had a Power of conferring inward Grace upon those who might be Eye-witnesses of it, this would very much alter the Case: But seeing Divine Grace is the incommunicable Gift of God alone, and the longer Sinners continue in an impenitent State, they render themselves at once more unworthy of it, and less disposed to comply with it; their Conversion must needs be attended with Difficulties answerable to these Defects.

And we know there is nothing but the Difficulty of subduing our criminal Appetites and Affections, and especially of freeing our selves from any sinful Habit or Habits that keeps us off from so necessary a Work.

So that, tho' a Sinner, upon seeing a Miracle done before his Eyes, should thereupon, which indeed 'tis very likely he would, be awakened into a more awful Sense of God and Religion, and enter into a speedy Resolution of reforming his evil Manners; yet when he comes to the Tryal, when he sets himself to root out those Vices which have been planted in him by long Custom and Continuance, and which 'twill go as near with him to part with, as the plucking out of a right Eye, or the cutting off a right Hand; Why 'tis reasonable to suppose,

2. In the *Second Place*, that he would take the same Methods to free himself from these Difficulties

culties which other People ordinarily do, who are equally convinc'd of the Necessity of Repentance, and that is still to put it off for a while longer.

Sinners never impose so grossly and fatally upon themselves, as when they sit down with the Hopes of a Repentance in Reversion; for by this means their Consciences are in some measure kept in Peace, and at the same time their criminal Appetites and Passions indulg'd. They find themselves at present indispos'd to the Duties of Religion, or under the Power of some vicious reigning Inclination, which they are resolv'd to gratify; but they hope to remedy all one time or other by an after-Repentance. Thus they endeavour to reconcile a present State of Sin and Impiety, with the Hopes of taking up, and getting to Heaven at last.

Vain Men! as if hereafter they could have any reasonable or tolerable Grounds to expect that they shall be in a better Disposition to religious Duties than they are at present; seeing the longer they continue in a sinful State, the stronger will their sinful Passions grow, and their Hearts more obdurate and insensible to the Impressions of Religion: And, in proportion, as they strengthen the Power of Sin, they must sensibly weaken the Powers of Grace and Reason.

So that if the Trouble and Inconvenience of the Work be any tolerable Reason why Sinners should still put off their Repentance, they may as well lay aside the Thoughts of ever repenting at all; because the longer they live in an impenitent State, the present Trouble and Inconvenience they complain of will *still* be greater, and more difficultly conquer'd.



'Tis agreeable enough therefore to the Design of the great Enemy of Mankind, that Sinners should flatter and delude themselves with vain Hopes and Overtures of repenting one time or other, when they are better dispos'd for it, which 'tis highly probable they never will be. For this old Deceiver knows very well, and I am confident all wicked Men must observe it themselves, that every further Delay of their Conversion both increases the Difficulties of it, and renders them at the same time more backward and averse to it.

For the true Reason, why Men (if they will seriously put the Question to their own Hearts) do not immediately set themselves to the Business of Repentance, is this, *that the Time is present*; but now when that future comes, which they have fore-cast and assign'd for this Work, why the same Reason will return with it. The Time will be *present* still, and so they will run on in a perpetual Circle of Sinning, and the Designs of Repenting; and the Force of that Objection which at first lay against their putting those good Designs in Practice will be daily more prevalent, and fill their Minds with the Apprehension of greater Difficulties and Discouragements still, in the Ways of Religion.

We see then, 'tis not for want of Conviction of the Guilt and Danger of Sin, that Men continue in a sinful impenitent State, but from a vain Presumption upon a more convenient Season, and better Disposition for the Work of Repentance hereafter.

But the very same Reason, I say, would betray Men into sinful Compliances, and retard them in their Preparations for entering upon a  
new

new Course of Life, notwithstanding the suppos'd frequency of Miracles.

Would a Miracle tend to convince a Sinner of the divine Authority of the Laws of the Gospel? That we *here* suppose him convinc'd of already. Would it tend to enforce his Obedience to those Laws, by conveying any spiritual or sanctifying Graces into his Nature? That I have shewn it has no manner of natural Efficacy to do. What would it then do in order to his Conversion? You will say it might be an *Occasion* of bringing him to a better Temper of Consideration, and of making him take up some speedy Resolutions of Amendment. 'Tis granted; but then such a Resolution is no more than what we see Sinners taking up daily, and yet notwithstanding this, How ordinary is it for them to shift off their Repentance from Time to Time, 'till it be past Time? How many Thousands and Thousands have gone out of the World with the Guilt of Impenitence, and the Designs of Repentance at once?

To resume our former Instance of the Resurrection of one from the Dead; it may perhaps be urg'd, and it seems all that can be urg'd in the Case, that tho' Men firmly believe the Scriptures, and are very sensible of the Folly and Danger of delaying their Conversion; yet to converse with one that is fresh come out of the Flames of Hell, and a dreadful Spectacle of the Horror and Despair that reign in it, could not but for some time at least give a Sinner more awful Apprehensions of Religion, and the *Terrors of the Lord.*

Examples we know are far more prevalent than the most lively and moving Descriptions; and tho' we firmly believe the Truth of any Thing, yet when it comes before us, and we see it exemplify'd or confirm'd by a plain and obvious Instance, it brings the Matter nearer to our Thoughts, and at the same time more powerfully awakens our Attention, and moves our Affections. Thus Men may argue with respect to all other Miracles, that they may be *occasional* Motives at least to the Conversion of a Sinner, by putting him upon making proper and useful Reflections upon them.

They may be so: And I will so far admit the Propriety of the Objection, as to grant that 'tis not improbable the Sight of any miraculous Event might for the present make a very strong and awakening Impression on the Mind of a Sinner upon whom the ordinary Means of Grace have no sensible Effects. But then it will appear under,

2. My Second Head, to which I now proceed, that it is not reasonably to be expected, such an Impression should be of any long or lasting Continuance.

To convince us of this, let us consider a little, what is commonly the Issue of those pious Resolutions Men are forward to make in other Cases, when startled by any extraordinary Accident or Providence.

How usual is it for the most profligate Sinners, when the Hand of God is upon them, and presseth them sore in any grievous Affliction, especially such as their Sins have visibly brought upon them? How usual, I say, is it for them to be touch'd to the quick with a Sense of their Guilt; and

and to have their Consciencies awaken'd out of that deep Sleep they had been perhaps seiz'd with for many Years before?

Upon such Occasions your greatest Sinners will for the Time be in a sober and religious Mood; and with *Abah*, give many external Signs of their Humiliation: They will fly out into sudden Heats and Transports of Zeal, and resolve out of hand upon Reformation and Amendment. But alas! when they come to prove their Resolutions, and meet with more Opposition than they were aware of, or did not thoroughly consider; How small is their Strength? How soon many times are they overcome? How apt are they to look upon Religion as a galling and grievous Yoke, and destructive of the natural Rights and Liberties of Mankind?

'Tis easy to conquer any thing in our own Minds and Imaginations, and to make a good Resolution; but the great Difficulty lies in making our Resolutions good: and such a Difficulty, if we may judge by the general Event, as the bold and forward Attempts of wicked Men, which they make in the Heat of their Zeal, are seldom able to surmount.

Your greatest Libertines, who have liv'd all along in open Contempt and Defiance of the Living God; who imagine there is nothing so brave as to appear above the slavish Impressions, as they account them, of Religion. Yet when they come to be under the Apprehensions of Death, are usually the most despicable forlorn Wretches in the World. I grant, that a Man, by a long Habit of Sin, may contract such an Insensibility of Mind, and Obduracy of Heart, as to die hard, in the modern Language; which  
yet



yet is only a softer Expression, for dying without *Understanding*, and like the *Beasts that perish*.

But the Examples of such stupid and relentless Souls, 'tis to be hop'd are very rare and uncommon. The great Sinner, when he comes to die, is for the most Part the great Penitent. What would he not then give that he had made a better Use of his Time, and liv'd in a faithful and conscientious Discharge of his Duty towards God, and towards Man? How feelingly, as if the Pains of Hell had already taken hold upon him, will he speak of the Judgment of God against Sin; and how affectionately warn others from following his Example? In a word; how Exemplary will he be in all godly Conversation and Honesty? How remarkable an Instance of the Sincerity of his Conversion, if God in Mercy please to restore him?

God hears his Prayers, and does restore him; and yet he returns again to his former vitious Course of Life: Nay, and like some Metals, many times proves the harder for having been melted down. *The unclean Spirit, when he returns, brings with him Seven other Spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last State, of such a Penitent, is worse than the first.*

Another Instance to my present Purpose shall be taken from those sensible Convictions Sinners are frequently under upon their hearing or reading the Word of God. 'Tis no wonder that *Fælix* was so deeply wounded, when he heard the Apostle, tho' in the Circumstances of a Criminal, discoursing of those Virtues he was notoriously defective in, and backing his Arguments and Motives to observe them, with the

Con,

Consideration of a *Judgment to come*, Acts xxiv.

25.

When the Wrath of God is denounced against any Sin, and the Application comes home to the Sinner, and tells him, *Thou art the Man*; the Effect it has been upon him, if he be not wholly incorrigible, cannot but carry a very great Force and Efficacy along with it.

And I do not at all doubt, but a great many Persons upon hearing the Word of God preach'd in a rational, persuasive, and affectionate Manner, are as apprehensive of the Folly and Danger of their Sins, and do as fully resolve for the Time to forsake them, as if a Miracle were wrought before their Eyes, or a special Preacher sent unto them from the other World.

And yet how soon is this good Seed of the Word choak'd, by the Cares or Pleasures, by the Business or Amusements of Life. Scarce do those good and promising Resolutions, which it produces, spring up, but they many times immediately vanish, and come to nothing.

So that it appears Men may make sudden Efforts and Motions in Religion, and express a warm Zeal and Temper of Mind in their first Designs of Repentance, and yet for want of God's Grace, which 'tis not so much as pretended Miracles have any Power of conferring when they come to the Tryal, be shamefully baffled and defeated. But,

3. Tho' what is here asserted could not be made appear from probable Reasons and Arguments; yet 'tis confirm'd by Experience and undeniable Matters of Fact. We have numerous Examples in Scripture, and it may not be improper to instance in some few of them to this Purpose. And,

1. Who

1. Who would have thought that *Pharaoh*, after all the Miracles which were done before his Eyes, and which he did not only see, but feel the dreadful Effects of, should still have persisted in his Contumacy and Disobedience to the Commands of God?

That a special Prophet from Heaven, testifying his Mission by a Series of miraculous and unquestionable Facts, should not humble the Pride of this Prince, and reduce him to an entire Submission, and that too after his frequent Relentings, is so surprizingly strange, that we could scarce have believ'd it possible, did not the Holy Scriptures record it to be true; but withal 'tis an admirable Instance to shew us, that to conquer and reclaim an obstinate Sinner, is the greatest Miracle of all.

2. So again, notwithstanding the many Miracles *Moses* afterwards wrought in the Deliverance and Preservation of the *Jews*, What little Effect had they towards reclaiming them either from the Error or Evil of their Ways? How apt were they to forget God their Saviour, who had done so great and wondrous Things for them, to murmur against him, to Apostatize from him, and to fall into other Abominations of the Heathen? And tho', after *Moses*, God rais'd up a Succession of other Prophets, in which respect alone the Dispensation of the *Jews* was a continued and standing Miracle; yet how are the prophetical Writings every where filled with grievous Complaints of their Sins and Impieties. So tho' *Isaiah* puts the Question in the Name of God, Chap. v. 4. *What could have been done more to my Vineyard, that I have not done to it?* Yet it appears by the Answer in the following Words,  
That

That all he had done, all the Signs and Wonders wherewith he had interpos'd to plant and cultivate this Vineyard, were far from producing the Fruit that might have been expected. *Wherefore when I look'd it should bring forth Grapes, it brought forth wild Grapes?*

3. During our Saviour's Ministry here upon Earth, tho' it had not been heard from the Beginning of the World, that any Man had done those Miracles he did, either for Number or Quality; yet some of those very Persons, who were convinc'd by them of the Truth of his Doctrine, forsook him, and *walk'd no more with him*, when they begun to be apprehensive of the Difficulties which would occur in the Practice of it. And afterwards, when the Apostles enter'd upon the Government of the Church, tho' Miracles were very ordinary and frequent, yet for the sake of this present evil World, the Love of many waxed cold; and others were even then of so facile and moderate a Temper, that they were neither cold nor hot. Nothing indeed can be more plain from all the Apostolical Writings, than that there were Corruptions among Christians even in the Infancy of the Church; and that several, who in their Words confess'd him, yet in their Works *deny'd the Lord who bought them*.

What I would now infer, and what I hope sufficiently appears from all that has been said, is, that the Reasons both of the Incredulity of Unbelievers, and the Corruption of Christians, lie in the Perverseness of their Wills, and the Force of their sinful Inclinations or Habits; and that while Men are under the Power and Influence of these Prejudices, which the Grace of God can only remove, all the Miracles recorded in  
Scripture,



Scripture, should God condescend to repeat them, would be ineffectual, either to their Conviction, or their Conversion.

Give me leave to conclude now with a Word or two,

1. By way of Caution: And,

2. Of Exhortation.

1. And *First*, When I say that Miracles are not now necessary to the Conviction of Unbelievers, I would be understood as speaking only of such Unbelievers as live and converse among Christians, and may at any time have the Proofs of Christianity laid clearly before them.

But the Case is different, as to those Heathens who are altogether Strangers to the Records and Testimony, whether Divine or Human, upon which we establish the Truth of our Holy Religion. For tho' it must be own'd, that the Morals and Doctrines of the Gospel are most Sublime and Excellent, and every way worthy of God, yet our Saviour and his Apostles, who perfectly understood the Force of these internal Proofs, of Christianity, always appeal'd to the external Evidence of it: To those *mighty Works* whereby *Christ was declar'd to be the Son of God with Power.*

In order therefore to convince such Infidels, we must prove to them that those Works were really done at the Time, and in the Age, when they are reported to have been done: But how shall we do this all of a sudden, to Persons who have never had an Opportunity of examining the Facts of the Gospel, and who perhaps have scarce ever heard of the Name of Christ before?

Shall we say that those who are employ'd in propagating the Gospel, ought to be believ'd up-  
on

on their bare Credit or Testimony? This ought not to be granted; and would in many Respects be of dangerous Consequence if it should.

We must therefore, before we can expect such Infidels should assent to the Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, convince them of their Truth and Divine Authority; but this depending upon a Train and Method of Proofs, which they are altogether Strangers to, and which 'twill require much Time, and a very particular Application to make them sensible of the Force of it: For these Reasons, I say, 'tis agreeable to the Wisdom and Goodness of God to suppose, that where he designs the Conversion of any Infidel Nation, he may empower those, that are employ'd to convert them, to work Miracles. We ought always to believe that where God designs any End, he will make use of proper and likely Means to produce it.

But in a Christian Nation, where the Proofs of our Holy Religion are easily made out and put together, and set in so clear Light, as they are in many excellent Modern Treatises written for this Purpose; there, I say, the Reason of Miracles ceasing, the Necessity of them, in order to the Conviction of Sinners, must of Course cease with it.

So again: When 'tis said that Miracles are not necessary to the Conversion of Sinners; I do by no means intend, that a Miracle may not, by awakening the Attention, and imprinting a more awful Sense of the Power of God upon the Mind of a Sinner, be instrumental towards his Conversion: There seems to be no Reason, why we should not attribute as great Force to a

Miracle, in order to this End, as to a Hurricane, or an Earthquake, or a Flash of Lightning.

But my Meaning is, that where a Sinner stands out against all the ordinary Means of Grace, there is no Reason to expect that a Miracle would be attended with this Effect; but that, as in the other Instance, I have mention'd, how strong soever the Impressions of it might be for a Time, yet they would, in all Probability, by Degrees wear off again. But whether they would or no, 'tis certain there is no necessity that God should employ an extraordinary Power to produce an Effect, which it has no natural Efficiency of it self to produce, and which he has prescrib'd us the ordinary Means of.

In a word; *granting* that a Sinner, by *Occasion* of a Miracle, should be brought to Repentance, yet even upon this Supposition his Repentance, is not to be ascrib'd to the Power of the Miracle, but of God's Grace; which God may, if he pleases, and certainly will, if we be not wanting to our selves, confer in a more ordinary way, and more suitable to the establish'd Methods of his governing the World. But,

2. One Word more by way of Exhortation, and I shall detain you no longer.

If then God Almighty has afforded us all proper and sufficient Means both to convince us of the Truth of our Holy Religion, and persuade us to the Practice of it; let us faithfully endeavour to employ and improve those Means to the Ends they are design'd; let us frequently reflect on the Reasonableness of Christianity, and the Evidence of its Truth, that our Faith may not only be built upon a firm and solid Foundation, but that we may be able also to convince Gain-sayers

# S E R M O N XI. 275

sayers; and be ready always to give an Answer to every Man, that asketh us a Reason of the Hope that is in us, 1 Pet. iij. 5.

But what it seems chiefly necessary to exhort a Christian Auditory to, is, that they would, as the Apostle exhorts, in the former Part of the Verse, *sanctify the Lord God in their Hearts*, and live in a religious and careful Use of all those means God has appointed for their Growth and Improvement in Grace.

But of the several Means which God of his great Mercy has prescrib'd to this End, the Time will but permit me to mention one; and that is, a diligent and devout Reading of the Holy Scriptures.

And I the rather Instance in this Duty, because when the rich Man is represented in the Parable, as desiring *Abraham* to send one from the Dead to his Brethren (as of all other extraordinary Methods the most proper to reclaim them) *Abraham* does no more but refer them to the Holy Scriptures; *They have*, says he, *Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them*, Luke xvj. 29. And it must be own'd, that to those who believe the Holy Scriptures, as I hope in God every Man here does with all his Heart, and as 'tis reasonable to suppose the rich Man's Brethren themselves did, from their having them in their Hands: It must be own'd, I say, that to such Persons the Holy Scriptures are of very great Force and Efficacy to persuade, and to make the Man of God perfect, thoroughly establish'd to every good Work. These are the Terms wherein Holy *David* speaks of the inspir'd Writings of the *Old Testament*; *The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the Soul; The Testimony of the Lord is sure, making*



## 276 SERMON XI.

*wise the simple; The Statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the Heart; The Commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightning the Eyes. The Efficacy of the Evangelical Writings, in order to the Conversion of Sinners, is spoken of in the most high and magnificent Terms imaginable. The Gospel is called, The Power of God unto Salvation, Rom. i. 16. The Word of Life, Phil. ij. 16. The Word of God quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edg'd Sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the Joints and Marrow, and is a discernor of the Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart, Heb. iv. 12.*

Let us then have these divine and lively Oracles, which have so great an Influence in converting the Heart, frequently in our Hands. 'Twas to *Moses* and the Prophets, you hear, that *Abraham* directed the rich Man's Brethren when they were past all other Hopes. And if Sinners will still treat the Holy Scriptures with Contempt or Neglect, especially, when a greater than *Moses* and the Prophets calls upon them to Repentance, there are no ordinary Methods left to reclaim them: And even if God should have recourse to extraordinary Methods, and work a Miracle in order to cure them of their Blindness and Obstinacy, their Conversion (for nothing but the Almighty Power of God's Grace could Convert them) would be no less a Miracle of the Two.

SER.

## S E R M O N XII.

The Folly of worldly Wisdom in the  
Use of sinful and indirect Arts to  
accomplish its Ends.

M A T. xvj. 26.

*For what is a Man profited, if he shall gain the  
whole World, and lose his own Soul? Or what  
shall a Man give in Exchange for his Soul?*

**T**HE more effectually, to discover the Folly  
of Men, in endangering the Loss of their  
Souls upon any worldly Prospects, our Saviour  
here puts a Case, which never did, and in all  
probability never will happen: He supposes that  
a Sinner, by such a Loss, might make himself  
Master of the whole World, and have all the  
Wealth and Pleasures, and Honours of it entire-  
ly at his own Command.

Yet even upon this improbable, or rather in-  
deed impossible Supposition, he gives us to un-  
derstand, that such a Person would be no Gainer,  
but on the other Hand infinitely a Loser by  
the Bargain; for a Soul once lost, in the Sense

we are to explain the Text in, is lost irrecoverably, and *for ever*.

Our Lord puts the Case indeed by way of Question ; but that, according to a usual way of speaking in Scripture, and Human Authors, only imports a stronger Asseveration of what he designs ; namely, that none of the Advantages of this World, let us set them in the best Light we can ; no, not all of them together, are sufficient to compensate, when we consider the Worth and Excellency of it, for the Loss of *one* Soul.

That I may therefore represent to you in a more particular manner, how contrary Men act to all the Rules of common Sense and Prudence, in hazarding the Loss of their immortal Souls for the sake of the World, or upon any worldly Views whatever, I desire you to go along with me, in the Three following Considerations.

I. That the Advantages of this World are uncertain.

II. That they are Unsatisfactory : And,

III. That they are Temporary.

*First*, The Advantages of this World are uncertain, and that both in the Prospect, and in the Possession. 'Tis suppos'd here, indeed, by our Saviour, that a Man may, by the Loss of his Soul, gain the Advantages he proposes to himself in this World ; and so be consider'd (as he shall be afterwards) in actual Possession of them. But it does not follow from hence, but that a Man may also lose his Soul in the Pursuit of those worldly Designs, which he will never be able to accomplish : And therefore it may not be improper to observe by the way, that the  
Things

Things of this World, for which Men so often expose their immortal Souls to inevitable Ruin and Destruction, are,

1. Uncertain in the Prospect. A great Number of those, perhaps the greatest Number of them, who have recourse to sinful and indirect Arts, in order to the Success of their worldly Designs, do not after all succeed in them. 'Tis certain, that in the natural Order and Tendency of Things, a good and religious Life lays the surest Foundation, upon which to build the Hopes of Temporal Happiness and Prosperity; yet, generally speaking, the Observation of the Wise Man holds still true, *Prov. ix. 1. That there is one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked.* And therefore we see the best and the worst of Men indifferently sharing the Blessings and Evils of this Life.

Yet tho' for wise Reasons of his Providence, God sometimes suffers wicked Men to prosper in very ill Undertakings; he at other Times turns them backwards, and disappoints their Devices, that they are not able to perform them. For a *Man's Heart*, as Solomon elsewhere observes, *deviseth his Way*; yet, *'tis the Lord that directeth his Steps*, *Prov. xvj. 9.*

So that tho' a Man, who has any worldly Interest in his Eye, lay his Designs never so artfully, and proceed in the Execution of them with all the Dexterity and Address imaginable, yet one unforeseen Accident or other frequently starts up in the way, and utterly baffles and defeats his Expectations.

And can there be a greater Argument of the Folly and Stupidity of Men, or any Thing more contrary to the common Maxims of Prudence,



whereby they govern themselves for the most part in other Cases, than that they should *set their Eyes upon Things that are not*? Or which, after all their Pains, they may not be able to compass; to the Neglect of those true and *durable Riches*, which are at once infinitely more worthy of their Pains, and *certainly* attainable by them. But,

2. The Advantages of this World are uncertain in the Possession. What I would here observe, is not the Vanity and Uncertainty of all worldly Enjoyments in general, but that wicked Men, who are here suppos'd throwing away their Souls upon the sinful Gains of this World, have reason in particular to be apprehensive of the precarious State and Condition of their Affairs. That they have so, I shall shew,

First, From the Natural Tendency of Things.

Secondly, From the general Experience of Mankind.

1. From the natural Tendency of Things. There is no Man who raises his Fortune on the Ruins of his Conscience and Integrity, but how great a Master soever he may be of all the Arts of Dissimulation, or how high soever he may build, yet he will be in danger one time or other of being found out, and taken down; and when he is so, all Persons will beware of him, and of having any Commerce or Correspondence with him: His very pretended Friends (for worldly designing Men, who stick at nothing in the Pursuit of their unjust Designs, have seldom any other) will be apt to discover a great Indifference to his Interests, if not a total Neglect of them.

For

For as bad as the World is, to do it right, 'tis generally more inclin'd to favour a Man of Probity and good Principles under any Circumstances of Misfortune or Disgrace, than One who has abus'd his Power, his Authority, or Wealth to wicked Ends, or acquir'd them by dishonourable and wicked Means.

'Tis true, such a Man, while all Things go smoothly on with him, and succeed to his Desires, may secure to himself some Degree of outward Respect: He may be courted and caress'd, or perhaps follow'd, by a Crowd of very humble Servants; but when he is going down, People are generally more forward to push than to support him; and sometimes those very Persons who have been supported by him.

Solomon observ'd in his Days, That when the Wicked Perished, whether we are to understand thereby his Death or his Disgrace, *there was shouting*, Prov. xj. 10. And holy David, before him, supposes good Men themselves (tho' we must allow for the Severity of the Dispensation under which he liv'd) triumphing in the Publick Justice, that was done upon great and notorious Delinquents; *The Righteous shall rejoyce when he seeth the Vengeance*, Psal. lvij. 10.

The Truth is, all Men have naturally an Idea of Order, and Love for it; and tho' they do not act in particular Instances conformably to this general Idea, yet they cannot but entertain a secret Esteem and Veneration for those that do, and in their Hearts condemn those irregular and unjust Practices in others, which perhaps they may find their own Account in: But however, abstracting from the Motives of Self-Interest, People are generally well enough pleas'd with  
the

the Occasions of seeing wicked and unjust Men humbled.

But setting aside all the Inconveniences which the Arts of unjust Gain may bring upon Men, from the general Distaste they give, and the secret Disesteem and Suspicion, at least, of all that know them; without any regard to this, I say, the Providence of God seems more peculiarly concern'd to do it self Justice upon such Men. Government being the Ordinance of God, and one End of it being the Preservation of the Civil Rights of Mankind; and this End not being attainable by the best Provision and strictest Execution of Human Laws; for there are many Ways, wherein Men may do a great deal of Wrong and Injustice, without any Danger of being called to Account; I say, in such Cases, where there is no coming at a great Offender, in any ordinary or human Methods of Proceeding, he has the greater Reason to apprehend, that there is one, *who is higher than the highest, regardeth*; and who, to this end beholds Ungodliness and Wrong, *that he may requite with his Hand.*

I do not say, the Justice of God indispensably requires, that he should execute Sentence speedily against wicked and unjust Men; or interpose always in a visible manner to bring upon them some proper Punishment or Disgrace: No, there are good and wise Reasons, why God should suspend the Execution of his Justice, upon many notorious Sinners of all kinds to another World. But this, I say, that God does often make himself known by the Judgment which he executes upon such Offenders in this World, and that none of them can be secure, this will  
not

not be one Day their own Case; especially, if they consider what I am to observe in the next Place,

2. The general Experience of Mankind, as to this Matter. How often has it been known, that Men, who by some little fraudulent Arts and Designs have set out briskly into the World, and perhaps for some considerable Time enjoy'd an uninterrupted flow of Prosperity; have yet by degrees, and sometimes all of a sudden been driven back by a contrary Current, notwithstanding all the Efforts of Human Wit and Industry to bear them up against it? Holy *David* observes it, as agreeable to the ordinary Methods of God's Providence, that such wicked Men *should perish*; and that they *should consume away like Smoke*, P<sup>sal.</sup> xxxvij. 20. And at the 35th and 36th Verses he speaks from his own Experience, *I have seen the Wicked in great Power, and spreading himself like a green Bay-Tree*; yet he passed by, and to he was not: *I sought him, but he could no where be found.*

In the Twentieth Chapter of *Job*, we have a very fine and delicate Description of the Tendency and Event of those unjust Measures which wicked Men employ in the Prosecution of their worldly Designs. Whether *Zophar*, who is there introduced as the Speaker, may be suppos'd as speaking by the Spirit of God, 'tis not necessary for me to enquire; it is sufficient to my present Purpose that he speaks the general Sense and Observation of Mankind, and appeals to common Experience, from the Beginning of the World, for the Truth of what he says: *Knowest thou not this of old, since Man was created upon the Earth, that the Triumpling of the Wicked is*  
but



but short, and the Joy of the Hypocrite but for a Moment? Though his Excellency mount up to the Heavens, and his Head reach unto the Clouds; yet he shall fly away as a Dream, and not be found; yea, he shall be chased away as a Vision of the Night, ver. 4. 5. &c.

And that the Man of the Earth, who pursues his Worldly Aims, by fraudulent and unjust Dealing, is the Person here describ'd, appears from the 18th and 19th Verses; *That which he laboured for shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down; according to his Substance shall his Restitution be, and he shall not rejoyce therein, because he hath oppress'd and forsaken the Poor.* The whole Chapter indeed is a very lively Representation of the Folly and Vanity of wicked Men in projecting great Things to themselves and Families, and of the Disappointments which such Projects are frequently observ'd to terminate in.

But there is (ver. 26.) a very bright and significant Metaphor to denote, more especially, what the Oppressor has one Time or other to expect; it is said, *A Fire not blown shall consume him*: That is, his unjust Acquisitions shall, as it frequently happens, waste away by insensible Degrees, or an invisible Manner: Or if he happen to escape these Providential Revenges upon his unjust Practices himself, yet the Providence of God will visit them upon his Posterity; *It shall go ill with him, as it follows in the next Words, that is left in his Tabernacle.* And we have the Reason why it should be so at the 29th Verse, because such a Retribution of wicked Men, either to themselves or their Posterity, arises from the settled Order and Course of God's Providence; *This is the Portion of a wicked Man*  
from

# S E R M O N XH. 285

from God; and the Heritage appointed to him by God.

I might confirm what is here observ'd from several Passages, both out of the Holy Scriptures and Prophane Authors; but there is scarce any Person, who has liv'd to a considerable Age, but has had Opportunities of making the same Observation himself. What amazes one most of all is, that after so many strange, and sometimes very unaccountable Consumptions of Estates unjustly acquir'd, Posterity should still praise the Saying, and go on in the Methods of their Forefathers; and imagine, notwithstanding, that the Effects of their Injustice shall continue for evermore.

Secondly, The Advantages of this World are also unsatisfactory. Let us here suppose a Sinner in safe and actual Possession of all his Heart can desire in this World, and saying *to the Gold, Thou art my Hope, and the fine Gold thou art my Confidence.* Under these Circumstances you will be inclin'd to think the Sinner himself a happy Man: No, were he really Master of all those Advantages which this finer Piece of Earth ordinarily Commands; yet *in the Fulness of his Sufficiency,* (as 'tis very well express'd by Zophar in the forecited Chapter, *ver. 22.*) *he shall still be in straits.* His Soul, the more noble and excellent Part of him, is design'd for a Happiness superior to any Thing this World can afford; the richest Scenes of Delight, which Nature or Art can furnish, are too low and unworthy an Entertainment for it: All that the more *violent* Pleasures can do is only to amuse it, but they can never satisfy the Desires of it; nothing can do that but the Supream and All-perfect Being it was made to love.

And

## 286 S E R M O N XII.

And therefore the Man of Pleasure seeks (but in vain) for that Happiness in Variety, which is not to be found in the Enjoyments of this World separately; he runs from his Diversions to Conversation, from Conversation to Books, from Books perhaps to some slight Business, and from that to his Diversions again; and having finish'd this, or the like Circle, he finds himself just where he set out, and still at the same distance from his Center.

Whatever Truth there may be in what is reported of the Hero, who conquered all before him, and then is said to have wept because there was no further Space for extending his Conquests; yet the Moral of the Story is certainly very good, and proper to shew us, that there is nothing in this World, nor all the Things of it together, equal to the Expectations and Capacity of a Human Soul. *The Bed, to speak in the Language of the Prophet, is shorter than that a Man can stretch himself upon it; and the Covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it, Isa. xxviii. 20.*

And therefore, tho' Man was originally placed in a Terrestrial Paradise, where he was bless'd with an Affluence of all Things his Eyes could desire; yet even when this beautiful Scene of Delights was opened to him in the Morning of the Creation, his Happiness did not consist in the Pleasures of Sense but in the Communications of Divine Light and Goodness: The Eternal God condescended to a free and familiar Converse with him; he took him as a Man may do his Child by the Hand, and led him into the Garden of Eden; he gave him Instructions to Cultivate and keep it; he brought the several

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Creatures he had made before him, and enabled him to give them Names significative of their Natures.

This was a State of Happiness agreeable to a reasonable Soul, and worthy of it; and good Men do still, by the Blessing of God, hear in part the Voice of inward Truth speaking to them, and feel the inward Delights of Grace; and in Proportion, as they are made Partakers of the *heavenly Gift*, they are happy, even in this World, and enabled not only to resist the Pleasures of Sense, but to despise them, whenever they come in Competition with their Duty.

For I do not hereby intend that a Christian ought to be a *Cynick*, or that the innocent sensible Delights of this World contribute nothing to our Happiness: Pleasure and Happiness are inseparable; whatever gives us Pleasure, makes us for the same Time, and in the same Measure and Degree, happy. Now God having afforded us suitable Entertainments for all our natural Appetites, there is no Crime in our being pleas'd and gratify'd in a sober and seasonable Use of them. Yet, as Man is born with Faculties different from, and superior to all other Creatures, he ought to design something more than a Happiness in common to him with other Creatures: He ought not, he cannot, indeed, content himself with any thing below that Happiness he was made to attain.

'Tis impossible then, in the Nature of the Thing, that a Man should find any perfect Satisfaction in the Enjoyments of this World: Even good Men, whose Enjoyments are regular, and who have for that Reason a better Taste and Relish of them, yet find little more in them  
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than to make their Lives tolerably easy; they are still carrying their Views forward towards a better Country, and thirsting, as in a barren and dry Land, where no Water is, for those Rivers of Pleasure, which make glad the City of God, and flow at his right Hand for evermore.

There remains therefore a Rest for good and holy Men, *the People of God*; but it ought to be consider'd, that a Man who loses his Soul, in pursuing the sinful Gains of this World, at once cuts himself off from all future Prospects, and renders even his present Enjoyments, if they may be call'd so, distastful to him; and that both from the Apprehension of Guilt, and the Expectation of Punishment.

I. There is no Sinner, but has in some degree, at least, the Use of his Reason; if he had not, he could not be a Sinner: For Sin is the Abuse of Reason, and must therefore necessarily suppose the Use of it. There are on the other Hand many Sinners, and they are often the greatest of Sinners, in whom the Light of Reason shines with a very bright and distinguishing Lustre.

Now Reason being the Rule of our Actions, whenever we act contrary to it, we are in that very Instance, Self-condemn'd; and tho' the Force of our Criminal Inclinations may still carry us against all our present Convictions, yet Reason will on one Occasion or other take a Time to talk with us, and bring us to Reflection.

The Spirits cannot always be kept up to a vicious and irregular way of Living; those that allow

allow themselves the greatest Liberties, must sometimes have cool and sober Thoughts; and when they have, that Reflex Act of Reason call'd Conscience will not fail to shew its Authority, and severely rebuke them for the Disorders they are guilty of; and then, how much soever they may, in the Height and Hurry of their sinful Passions, slight the Power of Religion, they will experimentally find the Truth of what the Prophet declares in the Name of God, *That there is no Peace to the Wicked*; and of what Solomon probably asserts from his own Experience, *True the Heart knoweth his own Bitterness*, Prov. xiv. 10.

Nay, I do not fear to appeal to the Consciences of all those who have given themselves up to a loose and sinful Course of Life, for the Truth of what is observ'd concerning them at the 13th Verse, that *even in Laughter, the Heart is sorrowful, and the end of their Mirth heaviness*. One bitter Ingredient or other is still mingling in the Cup of their Pleasures, or at least giving them an offensive and ungrateful Relish in the going off.

In Truth, the Happiness of Man is not to be sought for from without, but within himself; in the Regulation of his Conduct by the Laws of Religion, and the Testimony of a good Conscience arising from it. If a Man be not at Peace in his own Mind, or have the Guilt, tho' but of one very base and villanous Action, continually hanging like a dead Weight upon it, tho' he may boast of the Glory of his Riches, and the Multitude of his Children and Alliances, and other special Favours of Fortune, whereby he has been distinguish'd, yet all these things will profit him nothing: Nothing towards a true, solid,

and permanent Tranquility of Mind, tho' with *Haman*, he may possibly appear very happy to those, who do not see what passes within him, and lies at the bottom of his Heart.

And what is all the World to a Man that cannot, and whose Conscience indeed tells him he *ought not* to enjoy it? For Pleasure is the Reward of Virtue not of Vice. The Sinner deserves Pain and Punishment; and every Sinner knows that he does so, and that the natural Order of Things requires that it should be so. But this leads me to consider, in the next Place, the Reason of the Sinner's Dissatisfaction, amidst all the seeming Enjoyments wherewith he is surrounded in this World :

2. *From the Expectation of Punishment*; for as he knows that Punishment is his due, so he is assur'd, there is a Day a coming, wherein God will call wicked Men to a strict and severe Account, and render to every one of them according to his Works. Now, if the former Consideration from the natural Sense of Guilt make no great Impression upon the Mind of a Sinner, which it must do, if he have not wholly lost that tender Sense of Good and Evil, so deeply implanted in him: Yet, when he considers, that the Wrath of God abideth on him, that he must shortly, how soon he knows not, stand in Judgment before him, and receive the just Reward of his Actions: Such Reflections as these (and no Sinner can at all Times escape them) must necessarily fill his Mind with very dreadful and disquieting Apprehensions. But I shall have Occasion to say something more particularly as to this Point, under my Third and next Head; which is,

3. That

3. That the Things of this World are Temporary. And here we will consider the Sinner, as in all other respects, at perfect Peace and Repose in his own Mind, and saying, with the rich Man in the Gospel, *Soul, take thine Ease, Eat, Drink, and be Merry*, Luke xii. 19. Yet after all, this one Consideration, that his Soul must shortly, and for any thing he knows, the next Moment, be requir'd of him, should, one would think, be sufficient to cast a Damp upon his Spirits, and put a stop to his most gay and agreeable Designs: When he considers, that he is *but of Yesterday*, and his *Time but a Shadow*, the most desirable Things of this World must certainly appear of less Importance and Concernment to him, tho' there were nothing to follow: But when he casts his Eyes forward upon Eternity; upon that endless and unchangeable State, which God has prepar'd for those who throw away their Souls upon the sinful Gains or Pleasures of this World; how must such a Thought turn his Appetite to every Thing he possesses, and render it not so much desirable, as nauseous and distasteful to him?

Could we believe Man a rational Creature, if he acted so contrary to all the Maxims of Prudence, and common Rules of Reason in other Cases? Would any Man, who is under no Disorder of Mind, be prevail'd upon, were it practicable, to take the Crown from his Sovereign's Head, and put it upon his own for an Hour or two, upon this Condition, that he should immediately after, and so long as he liv'd, suffer the most exquisite, but withal, the most lingering Torments that could be contriv'd? Ambition, indeed, is a Passion of strange Force and Infatuation;



tuation; and the Desire of doing something to be talk'd of, has often put Men upon very extravagant and unaccountable Adventures; but a Man's Head must be strangely turn'd, who would accept of a Crown, and of all the Power and Pomp in the World along with it, upon these Terms. Yet this would be nothing to the Folly of a Man, who gives his immortal Soul in Exchange for a few gay and momentary Trifles; and thereby at once disclaims his Title to that endless State of Happiness, 'twas in his Power to attain; and plunges himself into a State of everlasting Misery.

Alas! what Proportion can we conceive between Time and Eternity? Eternity, that vast Circle, which the nearer we endeavour to take a View of, the wider it grows, and appears still the further from us: So that 'tis with our Contemplations of Eternity, as with those we frame of the great and eternal God; the higher we are capable of raising our Thoughts up to him, the the further they always seem to fall *below* him.

And therefore 'tis no wonder the Scriptures represent the Life of Man in Comparison of that endless State he is shortly to enter upon, by such Things as approach the nearest to *Nothing*, by a Vapour, a Bubble; and by a Shadow, which, indeed, properly speaking, is *Nothing*. I shall then yet not I, but the Apostle, recommend to you this as the most effectual Argument to dissuade you from throwing away your Souls upon the sinful Gains of this World, That *the Things which are seen, are Temporal, but the Things which are not seen, are Eternal*, 1 Cor. iv. 18.

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I shall now proceed to make some useful Improvements from what has been said, and so conclude. And,

I. Our blessed Saviour here supposes, that a Man by the Loss of his Soul might gain the whole World, and be the greatest and richest, and most powerful Person in it; and notwithstanding this, make a very foolish and pitiful Exchange. But pray consider, how often does it happen that Men risque the Happiness of their Immortal Souls, I do not say, upon a View of gaining the whole World, that is too chimerical a Design for any Person to form; but for the most trifling and inconsiderable Advantages of it: Nay, how often do Men run almost upon sure Damnation, even in Pursuit of Designs, which they have no Assurance, no Probability at least, scarce perhaps a Possibility of succeeding in?

I do not hear speak of Men, who deny the Immortality of the Soul, and a future Account to be given of their Actions; those who believe, that hereafter they shall be as if they had never been; and that their Body shall not only be turned into Ashes, but their Spirit vanish into soft Air, Wisd. ii. 23. Such Men, I say, do not act disagreeably to their Principles, in pushing their Fortune in this World at any rate. And therefore they are introduc'd, ver. 6. &c. as resolving to stick at nothing in the Way of their Criminal Pleasures, or unjust Designs: Come on, say they, therefore let us enjoy the good things that are present; and let no Flower of the Spring pass by us. — Let none of us go without his Part of our Voluptuousness. — Let us oppress the poor righteous Man. — Let us not spare the Widow,

*nor reverence the ancient gray Hairs of the Aged. —  
Let our Strength be the Law of Justice.*

Such Maxims, and a Conduct suitable to them, are no other than what may be expected from Persons, who have no Views beyond this World. But those who profess to believe nothing more certainly, than that *God created Man to be Immortal, and made him an Image of his own Eternity, ver. 22.* For Christians, a fundamental Article of whole Faith it is, that *the Son of Man shall come in the Glory of his Father, with his holy Angels, and then reward every Man according to his Works,* as himself declares in the Words immediately following my Text; for us, I say, who are fully persuaded in our own Minds of these important Truths, to hazard the Salvation of our Souls in the Pursuit of any worldly Designs, is what no reasonable or tolerable Account can be given of; and what indeed, did not Experience convince us of the contrary, we ought not, out of Respect to the common Reason and Ingenuity of Mankind, to believe; and what therefore, I cannot but think, 'twould be a very difficult Matter to make a Heathen believe, who has any Notion of the Principles of Christianity, and never convers'd among Christians.

But to be more particular in my Application, let us consider what Use can be made in the first place,

I. Of the Uncertainty of all worldly Enjoyments. Does it not appear from hence, that there is something in the Love of this World strangely infatuating, which blinds the Eyes, and perverts the Judgments of Men, and makes them act contrary to the general and establish'd Rules of Prudence, whereby they govern themselves

selves in all other Cases? So that *hearing, they shall hear, and not understand; and seeing, they shall see, and not perceive.*

For can any thing be more contrary to the Maxims of those who affect the Reputation of Wisdom, than to quit a Certainty upon a precarious and uncertain Prospect? Especially, where the thing in Expectation is far from an Equivalent to the Interest departed from, or given up for it.

And yet this is really the Case of every Man, who in his Heart departs from the Living God, to trust in uncertain Riches; or who quits his Interest in the glorious Promises of the Gospel for the sake of any, or, if that were possible, for all the Advantages of this World together.

'Tis true, he is not at present actually possess'd of the supreme Goods, and those great Things, God has prepared for them that love him; but with respect to the Event, what is in a Man's Power, if he be not wanting to himself, is as certain as if it were already in his Possession: We can only fall short of the Hope of Glory, by a wilful Neglect of the Means of Grace; God has put those Means, and thereby the Key of Heaven, into every one of our Hands; if we duly employ them, we know he is faithful who hath promised; we are assur'd, *our Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*

Now 'tis a mighty Encouragement to engage Men in any Design with Vigor and Resolution, when they have a certain Prospect before them of succeeding in it; yet this we see is the Encouragement which is given to us All, without Distinction, in the Gospel: The exceeding great and precious Promises of it, whereby we are



made Partakers of the Divine Nature, are not made to us, consider'd only as Learn'd or Illiterate, High or Low, Rich or Poor; but to one with another, as professing the Religion of the Holy Jesus in general; *Whoever believeth in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting Life.* ROM. VIII.

'Tis not in the Methods of God's Providence, as with those of his Grace; after all our Care and Endeavours, we are often cut short in our Expectations, and sometimes when they appear the most just and reasonable: And there is a very wise Design of Providence, why such Disappointments should happen to us in the Conduct of our Temporal Affairs. Did things always succeed according to our Schemes, and the Probability of Second Causes, we should be more apt (tho' that is a Vanity too common already) to sacrifice to our own Nets, and to say in our Hearts, the Power and the Might of our Hands *hath done this.*

'Tis no easy Matter to persuade Men to think soberly of their own Conduct and Abilities, when all things go well with them, and succeed to their Desires; notwithstanding we have so many Instances of an over-ruling Providence, to check the common Pride and Insolence of Human Nature, and to teach us, that whatever Men may design, yet 'tis God who does every thing. But had we no such Instances, and the Events of Life could always answer to Human, and even the most probable Means, the Wise Man would be more strongly inclin'd to think, that he had a Right to glory in his Wisdom; the Rich Man in his Wealth; and the Mighty in his Strength; and Men in general would be under greater Temptations to question, whether  
there

there be a God, whose Providence *ruleth over*

Yet, tho' it is not in our Power (nor fit that it should be) always to succeed in our Designs, as to this Life; what is infinitely more desirable, 'tis in the Power of the meanest Christian that lives, to make himself by a due use of the Grace that is given him, happy in the Favour of God here, and the sure Mercies hereafter, he has promis'd in the Gospel to all that faithfully serve and obey him.

How can we then, my Beloved, how can we answer it to our own Reason or Conscience, that we do not proportion our Care and Diligence to the Certainty of such great and glorious Expectations? Why do we not discover that Wisdom and Caution, which we ordinarily do about Things of little or no Moment, in Pursuit of the Things which are of the last Importance to us, and of which we can only miscarry by our own Default? And for which very Reason, no doubt, the Loss of our Souls will be for ever attended with so much the more grating and grievous Reflections.

But I observ'd further, that the Advantages of this World are not only uncertain in the Prospect but in the Possession. No Man, how high soever he bears himself is out of the Reach of adverse Accidents; the Foundation of his Happiness, if he place it in any present Enjoyments, is built upon the Sand; it may stand perhaps while he lives, but some unexpected Storm may even then too arise, and such Instances are not uncommon, to overthrow it: But whether he live to see the Ruins of it himself, it may not be improper to remind him, how little Reason

he has to expect, that his sinful Gains in this World should prosper in the Hands of those, that shall *have Rule over all his Labour, wherein he has laboured, and shewed himself wise under the Sun,* as Solomon speaks, but with a Design indeed to expose the Folly and Vanity of such a Man, *Eccles. ii. 19.* who has, in Truth, much greater Reason to fear, lest the Effects of his Injustice, like a secret Poison in a good and healthy Constitution, should eat out the very Heart of what has descended to him by Inheritance, or he has acquired by just and wholesome Methods.

2. From this Consideration, That all Temporal Enjoyments are unsatisfactory; I would observe another Instance of that strange Infatuation, which worldly Men are under. The Desire of Happiness is natural and invincible; but we have seen, that the Happiness Nature so irresistibly prompts us to pursue, is not attainable in this Life; the Consequence whereof one would think should be, that Men should have their Thoughts and their Hearts there where 'tis to be attain'd, and where, if they be not wanting to themselves they may certainly attain it: We see them on the other Hand seeking it in desolate Places, where it never was, nor ever can be found. So that, whereas Men by consulting their present Interest to the Ruin of their Souls, act in other Respects contrary to all the Principles of *Reason*; such absurd and contradictory Measures does the Love of this World put them upon, that they appear in this respect to take no small Pains to oppose their most strong and prevailing *Inclination*. This is the complicated Folly and Impiety, God, by the Prophet *Jeremiah*, reproaches the *Jews* with;

with ; *My People have changed their Glory for that which doth not profit*, Chap. ii. 13. And again, ver. 13. *My People have committed two Evils, they have forsaken me the Fountain of living Waters, and have hewed them out Cisterns, broken Cisterns, that can hold no Water.*

All that can be said for such a Conduct is this, that Men taste some imperfect kind of Happiness, at least, in the sensible Delights of this World, which they are willing to take up with, in lieu of that Happiness they so impatiently Thirst after : Yet this does not answer the Difficulty, or give us a sufficient Account how a Man, when 'tis in his Power to possess himself of a Happiness every way as great as his Heart can desire, should relinquish his Title to it, for the sake of those Things which, in Comparison have nothing in them : For on all other Occasions we find Men are content to deny themselves many Things, and to Sacrifice a present Interest or Inclination to a far greater Advantage (especially if it be certain) in Reversion.

But 3dly and lastly, What I would further leave an Impression of upon your Minds is, that the Enjoyments of this World are only Temporary : The Time is coming, and very near perhaps to some of us, but to be sure not very far distant from any of us, when we must leave this deceitful World, and enter upon an unchangeable State of Happiness or Misery to all Eternity, according to the Good or Evil we have done in this Life. Wicked Men, for so it will be to them, are for putting this Evil Day as far from them as they can ; but come it will, that's certain, and it may be when they least think of it. But, who for a thousand Worlds would be  
thus



thus surpriz'd? A whole Life of Sin and Luxury is not sufficient to compensate for the Horrors of those last Moments, wherein the Pains of Hell take hold of a Sinner, and his guilty Mind represents the Eternal God as inexorable to him.

What is here said affects the Sinner, even upon a Principle of Natural Religion, and his Belief in general of a Judgment to come: So that one would think even upon this Prospect, he should never be capable of tasting any sinful Pleasure, (which after all, he seldom is) either without Reluctance in the Commission, or Regret after it.

But when we consider the *Terrors of the Lord*, denounced against wicked and impenitent Sinners in his reveal'd Will; when we put the Question to our selves, as it concerns every one to do that believes those Terrors, *Who is able to dwell in everlasting Burnings?* How is it possible, while at the Time our Hearts condemn us, that all we ever saw with our Eyes should be able to give us, I do not say any true Satisfaction, but any tolerable Support under such dismal and terrible Expectations? It might be more reasonably concluded on the other side, that what a Sinner has gain'd by the Loss of his Soul, tho' it were the whole World, instead of contributing any thing to his present Happiness, should serve only to inflame his Guilt, and *Torment* him *before the Time*.

The Wrath of God *reveal'd from Heaven* against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men, and especially against those who hold the Truth in Unrighteousness, is so terribly severe, that some have thought it denounced upon Sinners purely

purely in *Terrorem*; and concluded, that 'tis not consistent with the Justice or Goodness of God to inflict those dreadful Punishments he has threatned. But has God indeed really threatned them? If he have, as most certainly he has, or else we cannot be certain of the Truth or Sense of any Revelation whatever; why, then the Wisdom of God is a sufficient Answer to all Objections of this kind: For 'tis obvious to every Body, that he could have no wise, or indeed reasonable End in threatning what 'tis impossible for him to execute. For why should a Man fear where there neither is, nor *can* be any Danger? This is what I argue; if it be inconsistent with the Justice, or other Attributes of God, to inflict the Threats he has denounc'd, 'twas inconsistent with his Wisdom, and for that very Reason, to denounce them.

These are Things which deserve to be very seriously consider'd; the Punishments God has threatned to Sinners are Eternal: How then will they be one Day asham'd and confounded to think, that in exchange of a few and insignificant Gains or Pleasures, which were but for a Season, they have plung'd themselves, Soul and Body, into a State of endless Perdition?

Not such a Perdition, as supposes their Souls annihilated, or extinc't; that indeed, since Matters are come to this pass, would be to wicked Men a desirable way of losing their Souls; tho' one would think too it should afford but a poor Consolation to Man, endued with a Soul naturally Immortal, to expect that he should die like the Beasts that Perish; and to have liv'd so as to render such a Death really eligible. But alas! tho' no Man, who considers the Worth and Dignity

## 302 S E R M O N XII.

nity of his Soul, would be content to lose it, even in this Sense, for the whole World; yet this is a Refuge which the Damn'd cannot fly to. To lose a Soul in the Sense of our Blessed Saviour, is not to have a Period put to its Being, but to have it continually and for ever Perishing in the most afflicting Circumstances both of Loss and Pain. So the Apostle expresses both these Punishments together, when he tells us, *That Sinners shall be punished with everlasting Destruction from the Presence of the Lord, and from the Glory of his Power.*

And now, to conclude, I hope we are all very sensible of the Folly Men are guilty of in pursuing any Advantages of this World by such indirect Methods, as may endanger the Loss of their Souls. I say, *indirect Methods*; for the Words of our Saviour do not suppose, but that a Man may gain and enjoy many Advantages to himself in this World, without losing his Soul. When therefore we speak of the Folly of Men in their Pursuit of the Interests of this Life, we do by no means intend that they are not desirable; for they may be made subservient to a great many good and excellent Ends of Religion itself: We only say, 'tis an Argument of the greatest Infatuation for Men to seek after them, at the Peril of their Immortal Souls. There is Scope enough for them to shew themselves wise to this World in the Ways of Virtue and Innocence. It seems, indeed, by too general and corrupt a Judgment, as if he were the only wise Man, who by any means can bring his Designs in this World to bear; but the most we can allow to such a Man is, that he has only a more artful

artful and shrewd way of playing the Fool; and this, how wise soever he may be thought by himself or others, he will one Day, without a hearty Repentance, certainly experience the Truth of. And therefore, that all these Considerations may teach us to be *Wise* to this World to Sobriety, to live in it as if we were not of it; and so to pass thorough Things Temporal, that we finally lose not the Things Eternal, God of his infinite Mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Manners of Christians, thereby to  
be of no Force

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John v. 2.

And his Commandment was not given us.

THIS is one of the common Prejudices against the Christian Religion, that it lays heavy burdens upon Men, and grievous, too grievous, to be borne; and that the Duties it requires of us, tho' we should suppose them possible, are attended with such hard Conditions, that tis difficult in the last Degree to perform them.

It was to obviate this Prejudice that our Saviour said to the Jews, *John vi. 28.*

My Father's will is, that every one who hears these Words, and believes them, should not perish, but should have eternal Life, and should not come into Judgment, but should be free from all Sin.



## S E R M O N XIII.

The Practicableness of our Christian Duty, and the popular Objection against it, from the ill Lives and Manners of Christians, shewn to be of no Force.

I JOHN V. 3.

*And his Commandments are not grievous.*

**T**IS one of the common Prejudices against the Christian Religion, that it lays heavy Burdens upon Men, and grievous, too grievous in this degenerate State of Human Nature to be born; and that the Duties it requires of us, tho' we should suppose them practicable, are attended with such hard Conditions, that 'tis difficult in the last Degree to perform them.

'Twas to obviate this Prejudice that our Saviour says to his Disciples, *Matt. xi. 38. My Yoke is easy, and my Burden light.* By using these Metaphorical Expressions of a Yoke, and a Burden, he does indeed insinuate, that how easy and delightful soever the Practice of Religion may be  
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in other Respects, yet as it is contrary in many Cases to the Motions of Concupiscence, and the Maxims of Self-love, we must expect, in a Course of Life strictly Religious, to meet at least with some Difficulties and Hardships.

And in this Sense we are to explain the Words of my Text, in answer to the same Objection. By saying, *The Commands of God are not grievous*; the Apostle does by no means intend that Christianity is calculated for slothful and idle Persons; but only that it requires nothing of us, how opposite soever to our criminal Appetites, but what there are a great many Considerations to sweeten the Trouble, and facilitate the Practice of; nothing, but what, all things consider'd, is, upon the whole Matter, very easy and supportable, as I shall endeavour to make appear from the Four following Particulars.

I. That the Laws of the Christian Religion are reasonable in themselves.

II. That the Practice of them lays the only Foundation of inward Peace and Satisfaction of Mind.

III. That we are encourag'd to practise them by the Assistance of a supernatural Power and Grace. And,

IV. By the Proposal of a glorious and eternal Reward.

I. The Laws of the Christian Religion are reasonable in themselves; that is, they are agreeable to the natural Light of our Minds, and the Answers of inward Truth, whenever we put the Question to it. 'Tis true, there are some few positive Commands in the Gospel, which do not

directly arise from any Principle of Natural Reason, but then they are such as cannot be urg'd to prove the Difficulties of reveal'd Religion; because, tho' the Light of Nature does not immediately dictate them to us, yet supposing the Truth of the Christian Revelation, God had wise Reasons for their Institution; and therefore they are reasonable as we say, *ex Hypothesi*, and in a secondary Sense, tho' not antecedently binding in their own Nature.

For Instance; It being suppos'd, that the Death of Christ was the great Means of reconciling Sinners to God; it was highly congruous in the Nature of the Thing, that some standing Memorial should be instituted of it, and that such an Institution should be thankfully and religiously observ'd. And this is the great Difference between the positive Commands of God under the *Jewish*, and those under the Christian Dispensation: The former appear to have had, generally speaking, no other Foundation than in the arbitrary Will of God, and to have been design'd purely as Tests of Obedience: The latter are visibly founded in some natural Aptitude, and Propriety of the Things themselves.

But besides the Reasonableness of the positive Ordinances of God, in the *New Testament*, consider'd in this Sense; there is a special Grace and Benediction accompanying the Observance of them. And, upon this account, they are so far from being a Burden to us in the Discharge of our Duty, that they are the great Means of overcoming Temptation, and enabling us to proceed chearfully in all Virtue and Godliness of Living.

But

But indeed they are not the instituted, but the moral Precepts of the Gospel, which Libertines complain of as so grievous and intolerable; that is, they complain of the Laws of Christianity for that very Reason which ought to recommend and enforce the Practice of them. And this they are so sensible of, that they seldom fail of entertaining a secret Esteem and Veneration for Persons truly Religious, how loose soever their own Conduct may be. And if they did but rightly consider Things, upon the same Score that they approve Virtue in others, they would find it the easier and more desirable to be virtuous themselves.

For certainly it cannot but be a great Satisfaction to a Man to consider, if he have any Consideration at all, that he is doing what his own Reason and Conscience tell him he ought to do; what is suitable to the Dignity of his Nature, and what he cannot but have a better Opinion and Esteem of other People for doing. A Sense of what Men owe to themselves, or their Character in other Cases, will carry them through great Difficulties, and sometimes the greatest Dangers; and certainly, had we that Honour or Respect for our own Reason and Understanding that we ought to have, it would very much lessen, if not wholly remove, the Difficulties we complain of in the Ways of Religion.

There is scarce any thing so difficult, which a firm and steady Resolution will not enable a Man to overcome; But what Designs should we engage more resolutely in, than those wherein we know we are right, and have Reason on our Side? What Rules should reasonable Creatures



follow, but such as Reason prescribes? And such are the Rules of our Holy Religion.

Had God requir'd, by Right of his Sovereign Authority, some great Thing of us; Should we not have done it? How much more when he says unto us, *Wash and be clean*; when he requires nothing of us but what has a natural Tendency to the Cure of our Disorders, and the Perfection of our Natures?

This very Consideration therefore, that *God hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good*, and that his Commandments are true and righteous altogether, is of it self sufficient to inspire thee with a Resolution to conquer the greatest Difficulties that may occur in a faithful Discharge of thy Duty: As we see in other Cases, what we propose to do, and is reasonable to be done, we cheerfully undertake and proceed in, tho' we meet with much Opposition.

II. The Practice of Religion lays the only Foundation of inward Peace and Satisfaction of Mind: This indeed is a necessary Consequence of our acting as becomes reasonable Agents. God having contriv'd it so, that all Creatures should be in a State of Ease and Order according as they follow the Laws and Principles of their several Natures; but Man, by following Reason, may be consider'd, as in an easy and regular State, both upon a natural and a moral Account: And who would not be content to undergo some slight Trouble and Inconvenience, or to deny himself in many Things, provided he may have all Things calm and quiet *within*. But,

I. The Practice of Religion has a natural Tendency to secure the Peace and Freedom of our

our Minds, as it preserves them in an even and sedate Temper; as it removes every Occasion of the Disorders which are apt to ruffle and discompose us, and keeps our Appetites and Desires within their due Bounds. And therefore those very Philosophers who made Pleasure the Rule and End of all their Actions, and deny'd that our criminal Passions had any Consequences after this Life; yet prescrib'd the Regulation of the Passions as necessary to that Ease and Indolence of Mind wherein they placed their supreme Felicity.

And it must be granted, that our Happiness does not depend so much upon any Advantages of Fortune, or the Superiority of our Condition in the World, as upon the inward Frame and Temper of our Minds. And therefore we see, that those who enjoy the most of the World, many times enjoy themselves the least: The Reason is, that they are under the Power of one prevailing criminal Passion or other, which either they have not the Means of gratifying, and then all their other Enjoyments become insipid, and *profit them nothing*; or if they have the Means of gratifying their Passions, the natural and ordinary Consequence is, that they are thereby still betray'd into further and greater Disorders: Whereas, he that governs himself by the Rules of Religion, by keeping his Appetites and Affections within their due Bounds, is at once easily satisfied, and freed from those Effects of criminal Pleasures, which, of all other Evils in this World, are sometimes apt to occasion Men the most sensible Pain and Disturbance of Mind.

2. Upon a moral Account, Religion gives us the Supports of a good Conscience, the Assurances of God's Favour, and fills the Mind with bright and pleasing Ideas. And this easy and serene State of all Things within, spreads such a vigorous Gaiety upon the Spirits, as frequently discovers it self in the very Air of the Face; that agreeable Air of Innocence, which makes a Man's *Countenance to shine*, and gives a better Grace to every thing he says or does.

The Wicked, on the other Hand, whose Guilt is continually flying in their Faces, and reproaching them for their Sins and Impieties, are not capable of any perfect Ease or Repose in their own Minds. And being uneasy to themselves, they are for that Reason generally less agreeable to others; nay, let them use what Arts they can to dissemble it, their Guilt, especially, of any great and grievous Crime, will lay so heavy upon their Spirits, as on many Occasions to betray it self in their Aspect or external Behaviour: An ill Conscience naturally gives a Man, o'er whom Religion has any Power, a low, sneaking and dejected Air. And there is Reason to believe 'twas this Fall of his Countenance which rendred *Cain*, after he had imbrued his Hands in the Blood of his Brother, so afraid of every Thing he met; *I shall*, says he, *be a Fugitive and a Vagabond in the Earth*, *ἐξὸν ἐ' τρεῖς*, according to the *Septuagint*, and perhaps with greater Propriety: That is, wherever I go I shall appear to be of an abject and tremulous Spirit; or of an Aspect different from the rest of Mankind, *Gen. iv. 14.* From whence, if *Quakerism* pretended to so great Antiquity, one, who would write the History

History of it, might most probably deduce its Original.

Under these Apprehensions, continues *Cain*, *It shall come to pass, that every one, whether Man or Beast, that findeth me, shall slay me.* As to what he had to fear from Man, the Threat of God, in the next Verse, was sufficient to secure him; but having lost that Native Majesty of Look which kept other Creatures in awe, 'twas necessary to his Preservation, that something should be done further towards protecting him from their Fury and Insults. To this end, *God set a Mark upon him*; by which I conceive, we are to understand no more than that God, to prevent any further Destruction of human Race, in the Infancy of the World, was pleas'd to give him, notwithstanding his Guilt, an uncommon Air of Awe and Terror in his Aspect.

What I would observe from hence, is, that if a guilty Conscience cannot many times be restrain'd from accusing it self to others, tho' Men do what they can to hide their Guilt, the inward Anguish and Reproach of it cannot but be very troublesome and uneasy to them.

Religion prescribes the Means to free us from these sad and lamentable Effects of Guilt. But that is not all: Instead of them it gives us unspeakable Joy and Consolation from the contrary Reflexion of a well-spent Life. Sinners indeed have no true Taste of the inward Joys of Innocency and good Conscience, and for that very Reason, because they are Sinners; but they ought not therefore to suppose them mere Illusions. A blind Man is no proper Judge of the Beauty of Colours; nor a dumb Man of the Harmony of Sounds. Shall we from hence con-



clude, that there is neither Beauty in the one, nor Harmony in the other? As little Reason is there why wicked Men should contemn or dispute those inward Consolations of Religion which we speak of, because they do not feel them; but let them, by a hearty and sincere Practice of their Duty, render themselves proper Judges in the Case, and then judge other-ways if they can.

It deserves our further Consideration, that besides the inward Complacency of Mind, arising from the Testimony of a good Conscience, which is an ordinary and natural Effect of it, Christians, in a faithful Discharge of their Duty, have their Hearts frequently fill'd with the Delights of an overcoming and supernatural Grace: A Beam of the Divinity shines as it were upon the Soul, and makes it feel a Warmth of holy Desires and Transports which cannot be express'd; and therefore this glorious Privilege of the Friends and Servants of God is sometimes express'd in Scripture by the Light of his Countenance, *Psal. iv. 6.* and at other times, by Joy in the Holy Ghost, *Rom. xiv. 17.* and by the Earnest of the Spirit, *2 Cor. i. 22.*

And God is pleas'd to dispense these peculiar Favours of his Grace to good Men in their greatest Extremities; and when human Comforts and Supports are most of all wanting. 'Twas upon this Reflection, Holy *David* addresses himself with so much Assurance to God; *Thou shalt make me to hear of Joy and Gladness, that the Bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.* And the Apostle expresses the same heavenly and spiritual Delectation, by our having the *Love of God shed abroad in our Hearts*, *Rom. v. 5.*

So

So that whereas wicked Men, when all Human Comforts or Prospects fail, have nothing in their Distress to trust or fly to; their Consciences, for their having offended God, being on such Occasions more awaken'd, and the natural Scourges of them turn'd into Scorpions; Good Men, in the most dark and dismal State of their Affairs, have not only a general Confidence towards God, but frequently feel those special and joyful Impressions of his Grace, which I have been endeavouring to give you some Account of. So the Apostle tells the *Thessalonians*, that notwithstanding the Circumstances of Distress they were under, they did not want such inward and spiritual Consolations, as were sufficient to raise their Minds above any Sufferings of this present Life; *ye received, says he, the Word in much Affliction, with Joy of the Holy Ghost*, 1 Thess. i. 6. But this leads me to the Consideration of what I propos'd in the next Place:

III. That we are encourag'd to the Practice of Religion by the Assistances of a supernatural Power and Grace. After all that has been said concerning the Reasonableness of our Christian Duty, and the joyful Reports of a good Conscience, or even those Divine Consolations which the faithful Discharge of it is attended with; it will still be pretended that Nature is frail and weak, that 'tis hard for us to think of fighting against our predominant Passion, but much more to subdue it. And it must be own'd there would be some Force in this Objection, were we entirely left to our selves, and had no Power given us from above, to enable us to do  
our

our Duty, and overcome the Motions of Concupiscence; but as we have such a Power, blessed be God for it! by virtue of his express Promise, this Objection, and whatever other can be fram'd against the Practice of our Duty, vanishes at once along with it. Tho' indeed, if we consider a little more narrowly, this is not properly an Obligation of Christians, tho' it is ordinary enough to hear it from them; but of Heathens and Infidels, against their embracing the Christian Religion.

For those who are already baptiz'd into the Christian Faith, and have taken upon them the Profession of it, are suppos'd, and describ'd in Scripture, as in a very different State from that of the *natural Man*; they are said *to be born again: To put off concerning the former Conversation, the Old Man*; and *to put on the New Man, which after God is created in Righteousness and true Holiness*, Joh. iii. 3. Ephes. iv. 22, 24. And therefore the Apostle, to shew the Difference of Men in their regenerate and unconverted State, having in the Sixth Chapter of the First Epistle to the *Corinthians*, given them a Catalogue of several very great notorious Sinners, immediately adds these Words: *And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctify'd, but ye are justify'd, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*, Ver. 9, 10, 11. So that whatever Force there may be in the Objection of a Heathen against the Practicableness of that Obedience the Gospel, requires, from the Corruption of Human Nature; yet such an Objection is quite out of Place from a Christian, who is suppos'd by that Character to have overcome the Corruption that is in the World

World through Lust, and to be transform'd into another Man.

From which I would observe, that 'tis a great Error in Christians, and a notorious Misapplication of those Texts of Scripture which speak of Man in his natural State, to excuse their Corruptions by those Arguments which are proper only to Heathens.

I do not hereby intend but that Christians, and sometimes the best of Christians, are expos'd to very many and great Temptations; but my Meaning is, that through Christ, by his Spirit strengthening us, there is no Temptation whatever which we shall not be able to conquer, nor any Duty incumbent on us, but what 'tis in our Power to perform.

For nothing is now more plainly revealed in the Gospel, than that God will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it; and still a greater Measure and Degree of it to those who make a due Improvement of the Grace that is given them. As our Saviour, whose usual Method it was to lead us to the Knowledge of Divine Things, by sensible and familiar Allusions, has particularly instructed us by the Parable of the Talents; in the Close of which we are told, *That unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance.*

So that the more we endeavour to do our Duty, the more we shall still, by the Grace of God, be enabled to do it: The longer we accustom our selves to the Yoke of Christ, the easier it will be; and in Proportion, as we make any good Progress in a Religious Course of Life, the less Reason we shall have to complain of the Difficulties and hard Terms of Religion.

And



# 316 SERMON XIII.

And indeed, what can be hard, what can be difficult to any one, that has engaged the Divine Power and Assistance on his Side? Is there any thing necessary to the Discharge of our Duty, which the Spirit of God cannot, which he will not effect for us, if we sincerely pray for his Grace, and follow the Motions of it? Nay, does not he often prevent us with his gracious Favour, by instilling into our Hearts good Desires at the very time perhaps our criminal Inclinations are carrying us another way? Tho' God has made Prayer a Condition of obtaining the Aids of Divine Grace, yet how often is his Holy Spirit found of those that seek him not? He stands at the Door of our Hearts, and knocks; if we will but open to him, if we will in any Measure prepare for his Reception, this Divine Guest will enter in, and make his abode with us.

This we are assur'd of by a covenanted Promise, that we shall have all necessary Supplies of God's Grace, in order to enable us to do our Duty. The Terms on our Part (Terms in our own Power) to entitle us to those Supplies, are only, that we sincerely, and upon all Occasions, pray for them, and heartily desire and endeavour to concur with them; and if we do what is thus incumbent on us, to qualify us for the Reception of God's Grace, and to make it operate in us with its due Force, we have nothing to fear from the strongest Opposition or Assaults of our spiritual Enemies: *For he that is in us, as the Apostle argues, 1 John iv. 4. is greater, or more powerful, than he that is in the World.*

Reason we shall have to commend us to God. So

So that by the Promise of Divine Grace God has put it in the Power of every one of us to *work out our own Salvation*; and therefore, whether we will be happy or miserable to all Eternity is now in our own Choice and Disposal; and if we finally perish, our Damnation is of our selves, and cannot be imputed to our Weakness but to our Wilfulness. When the Apostle puts the Question, *How shall we escape if we neglect so great Salvation?* Heb. ii. 3. He plainly supposes these Two Things; *First*, That no Christian shall be damn'd because he could not, but because he would not be sav'd, or did not comply with those Means of Salvation which God of his infinite Mercy has tender'd, and as it were put into the Hands of every Christian without Distinction; And *Secondly*, That it shall go worse at the last Day with wicked and impenitent Christians for this very Reason, who certainly have cause to fear the more terrible and severe Judgment will fall upon them for their Contempt and Abuse of so great Mercy. The Sum of what has been said is this; That nothing our Lord has commanded us in the Gospel is impossible to us, that is possible to the Spirit of God. If he, as he is always ready to do, assist our Endeavours there are no Temptations so strong, no Difficulties in the Ways of Virtue and Innocence so great, which we shall not be able to surmount: But still, if we be not willing as we are able to live in all sincere Obedience to the Laws of our Holy Religion, our Disobedience will be the more inexcusable; and the very saving Benefits of the Gospel, by our Neglect or Misapplication of them, will serve only to *increase our Damnation*.

And

## 318 S E R M O N XIII.

And yet I am sensible, the Sinner would willingly lay his Sins any where rather than at his own Door. One Man excuses himself upon the irresistible Force of Temptation; another upon natural Temperament; and a Third upon the Way or Circumstances of Life he is in. And there have been some, who have put an Excuse into the Mouth of Sinners, which if it had any true Foundation would be an Excuse indeed. They pretend, that 'tis only a select Number of Persons upon whom God has any Intention that his Grace should operate effectually; and that as to others, which they suppose to be the far greater Number of Christians, whatever they can do will be fruitless and lost Labour: And why then should they set about it? Or what can they propose to themselves in taking Pains to no Purpose?

But these are Pretences against a Holy and Religious Life, which no Sinner, that professes himself a Christian, can take Refuge in; and the latter of them, not to observe at present how highly it reflects on the other Attributes of God, is directly repugnant to his Veracity, and the general Overtures of Grace, which are made in the Gospel to all Christians indifferently. Our not doing our Duty, when God has promis'd to enable us to do it, upon our fervent Prayers for his Grace, and our faithful Endeavours to obey the Motions of it, cannot be ascrib'd to our Infirmary, but our Obstinacy: And we must answer at the great Day of Account the more severely for it; it being but reasonable that God should make Sinners feel the Effects of his Justice in proportion to the Measures of his despis'd and abus'd Mercy.

But

But if there be really that Power and Efficacy in the Christian Religion, which is pretended, in order to reclaim Sinners from the Evil of their Ways, and reform the World; Why, say the Libertines, do not we see a more general Reformation of it? Is it not visible on the other Hand, that the same Vices and Impieties reign among Christians, as among those who were never baptiz'd into the Christian Faith, and who have no express Promise of that inward and divine Principle we speak of? Nay, they push the Objection further, and ask, Whether sometimes the Motions of that Holy Spirit, to which we attribute the Conversion of Sinners, have not been pretended to authorize the greatest Villanies and Disorders? Thus the Enemies of our *Sion*, to express my self in the Language of the Prophet, *as they pass by clap their Hands at us; they hiss and wag their Head at the Daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the City Men call the Perfection of Beauty, the Joy of the whole Earth?* Lam. ii. 15.

This being an Objection which I propos'd on another Occasion to say something to; and which is not only urg'd by Infidels to discredit our Holy Religion, but by wicked Christians, to excuse their Corruptions; I shall here endeavour to give an Answer to it with all the Clearness and Brevity I can.

I. And *First*, It must be own'd that what is here objected proceeds upon such Grounds as there is in *Fact* good Reason for; it cannot be deny'd or dissembled that there is a great Corruption of Manners among Christians, and that the Effects of Divine Grace are not so visible in their Lives and Conversations, as might be expected: But it does by no means follow from  
hence,



# 320 S E R M O N XIII.

hence, that the Doctrine of Divine Grace is without Foundation, or that it is only a pious Fraud invented by Divines to persuade People to set about the Business of Religion with greater Vigour and Resolution. For,

2. There was a Time when Christians more generally distinguish'd themselves by a holy and exemplary Life, and adorn'd the Doctrine of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in all things. The wonderful Change that was made in the Temper and Manners of the first Converts to Christianity was visible to every Body; and is particularly made an Argument by the antient Apologists for the Truth and Divinity of our Holy Religion. And tho' such sudden and extraordinary Conversions, now that Christianity is planted in the World, and the Truth of it so fully establish'd, are not to be expected; yet, blessed be God, there are, in the ordinary and standing Methods of his Grace, a great Number of Christians who are careful to maintain good Works, and walk worthy of the Vocation whereunto they are called.

Notwithstanding the Corruptions of the Age, perhaps, there was never any Age, unless we ought to except the Apostolical, wherein a more solid, well-conducted, and unaffected Piety discover'd it self. So that 'tis not universally true, but thank God far from it, that we see no sensible Effects of his Grace in the Conversion of Sinners: Nay, I do not doubt to affirm, that even Christians of a more loose and negligent Behaviour, are, generally speaking, more regular in their Lives and Conversations, than Heathens or Unbelievers of any kind. But,

3. This

3. This Objection from the ill Manners of Christians, tho' it be a just Reproach to such Persons as give occasion for it, yet 'tis none to the Holy Religion they profess, because the Spirit of God does not work upon us in an irresistible Manner. He powerfully inclines and enables us indeed to do our Duty; but he does not forcibly compel us to do it. This is evident from the Reason of those Exhortations in Scripture, that we should not *grieve the Holy Spirit*; that we should not *render his Grace of none Effect*; and that we should *work out our own Salvation*; as also from that Freedom which is necessary to the Morality of our Actions, and the Nature of Rewards and Punishments.

If Christians therefore, by their wicked and unchristian Lives, will give occasion for the Name of Truth to be evil spoken of, this does not proceed from their want of Power, but of Will to do better; not from the Weakness or Insufficiency of Divine Grace, but from the Strength of their criminal Passions or Habits; which, by the Grace of God, if they would have endeavour'd it they might have freed themselves from; but if they would not endeavour it, who, or what should they blame but themselves? If a Man, under any dangerous Distemper, will refuse the only Remedy in the World that is proper to remove the Cause or Malignity of it, and restore him to Health; the Fault is not to be laid upon the Physician but upon the Stubborness and Folly of the Patient. In like manner, tho' God has prescrib'd proper Means and Helps, in order to heal the Corruptions, and repair the Disorders of our Nature, yet, if we will reject his Counsel against our Souls; or

make no use of those Means he has put into our Hands, we may as well ask, Why the Grace of God does not raise up Children to him of the Stones under our Feet, as why it does not convert such insensible and obdurate Hearts?

If any one think that this Doctrine detracts from the Freedom and Power of God's Grace; let him consider, whether it be not much more unreasonable, and unworthy of God, to expect that he should render his Grace so vile and cheap, as forcibly to confer it on Men, how much soever they slight and despise it.

As to the other Part of the Objection, which represents Christians as engaging sometimes in very ill Designs, under a Pretence of a Divine Impulse; the same Answer will indifferently serve to it. Namely, that while God does not destroy the natural Freedom of our Choice the best Things may be abus'd; and our Abuse of them does not affect their intrinsic Goodness or Excellency. But 'tis time for me now to proceed to,

IV. My *Fourth* and *Last* Particular, That we are further encourag'd to the Practice of our Christian Duty, by the Proposal of a glorious and eternal Reward. My Business is not here to prove the Certainty of that future State of Happiness which God has prepar'd for those that Love him, or to describe the Nature of it; this indeed, would be altogether impossible for me to set in a true Light. The most illuminated Understandings in this World, seeing only in Part, and having no perfect or adequate Notion of the Glory that shall be reveal'd hereafter; for, as the Author of the Book of *Wisdom* argues very well from our Ignorance of natural Causes, which

which we every Day see and feel, and taste the Effects of, to our imperfect Views and Conjectures of Things spiritual and invisible: *Hardly do we guess aright at Things that are upon Earth, and with labour do we find the Things that are before us; but the Things that are in Heaven, who hath searched out?* Wisd. ix. 16.

But what I am to shew at present is, That we know so much in general of that blessed and glorious State which is propos'd as the Reward of our Obedience, as is sufficient to raise us above all the Difficulties and Discouragements that can happen to us in the Course of it. Now Hope of Reward is in other Cases the great Spring of Industry, the main Support of the Patience and Resolution of Men. What will not the Man, whose prevailing Passion is Covetousness, do? Or rather, what will he not deny himself, in order to compass any worldly Advantage he has in his Eye? He will rise up early, and late take rest, and eat the Bread of Carefulness, or, perhaps, content himself (if any thing can be said to content him) without the common and ordinary Supports of Nature, so he may but gain his Point: He will run to and fro in the Earth, and to the utmost Regions of it; despise the Fatigues of the Ways and the Weather, the Danger of the Seas, and the Inclemency of the Seasons; and all this many times not upon a certain, but a contingent and precarious Prospect. Thus 'tis again with Men of Letters, who sometimes pore their very Eyes out in the search after Knowledge; which after all, perhaps, is attended with no other Reward but its own Reflection.



Is it not a very strange and unaccountable Thing then, when the Rewards of Heaven are set before us, that we should not more generally than we do, proportion our Care and Diligence to the Greatness and Certainty of them, but chuse rather to set our Eyes upon Things that are not ; or which, should we be able to compass, can neither afford us any solid or substantial Happiness, nor secure the Continuance of it to us ? But an endless and unchangeable State of Happiness, without Alloy or Intermision, without Mixture or Measure ; Good God ! who can seriously think of it, without despising those little Projects of Profit and Pleasure, which ensnare and enslave the World ? Who that has these things in View, can without some kind of Indignation, look down upon the petty Interests and Designs, wherewith the generality of Mankind seem wholly taken up, to the neglect of their great and supreme Interests ? Who on the other Hand that is animated with so great and firm Expectations, can think any thing impossible, any thing hard, any thing uneasy, that tends to the Accomplishment of them ?

We have a remarkable Instance of the Power of Religion over those who firmly believe the Rewards of another Life, and keep their Eyes steddy upon them, in the Person of *Moses*. This young Prince, amidst all the Splendor and Luxury, and Favour of a Court, loaden with Honours and Applause, especially, if it be true what *Josephus* reports of him, that he had distinguish'd himself at the Head of the Armies of *Egypt*, and been very victorious in an Expedition against the *Ethiopians* ; yet, I say, this excellent Person, tho' all these Circumstances concurred

# S E R M O N XIII. 325

curred to incline him to Pleasure, and inflame his Ambition; when his Duty call'd him another way, was insensible, or made himself so, to all these soft and blandishing Allurements. *He refus'd to be call'd the Son of Pharaoh's Daughter, chusing rather to suffer Affliction with the People of God, than to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin for a Season,* Heb. ij. 25.

And the Reason of a Conduct, which may appear so strange in a Prince of his Age and Education, and Personal Atchievements, is ascrib'd to the Strength and Efficacy of his Faith: *He had respect unto the Recompence of Reward.* And the same Prospect, no doubt, did we duly and constantly cast our Eyes forward upon it, would inspire us with an equal Ardor and Resolution to overcome all Difficulties whatever in the Way that leads to the same glorious End.

Especially, if we consider that we are never more active and resolute, than, when what we are in pursuit of, is the direct and immediate Object of our Love. For Love is a Passion, which of all others is the most strong and powerful; 'twill put Men upon doing things even above themselves; 'twill climb the highest Difficulties, and attempt, where there is occasion, the greatest Dangers; it delights to exert itself in the most noble, and generous, and engaging Instances of Obedience, as hereby it gives the best and most evident Proofs of its Sincerity: In a word, nothing can be thought difficult or disagreeable to Love, that is agreeable to the beloved Object.

Now God having impress'd upon our Hearts an invincible Love of Happiness, and that Happiness

pinefs consisting in the Enjoyment of himself; this very Consideration, one would think, should make us proceed chearfully and resolutely (whatever opposition we meet with) in the Practice of those Duties which tend to bring us nearer and nearer to him here, and to qualify us for the Vision and Fruition of him to all Eternity hereafter.

And indeed, this is the very Argument the Apostle uses, in the Words immediately before my Text, in answer to those Complaints Men are apt to raise concerning the Difficulties, and hard Conditions of the Obedience requir'd of them. *This, says he, is the Love of God, that we keep his Commandments; and his Commandments are not, that is, for this very Reason, they are not grievous.*

And yet, to prevent Mistakes, I do not say that the Practice of Religion is equally easy to all Persons; no, whatever it may be in its own Nature, there are a great many occasional Circumstances which may render the Practice of it more difficult to some Persons than others. Those, particularly, who have liv'd long in a Course of Sin, or have contracted any bad Habits, must expect to be at a great deal more Pains than would have been otherways necessary to mortify their criminal Passions, and engage them heartily in the Discharge of their Duty. But, as 'tis by their own Fault or Neglect that they have made the Way which leads to Life *more narrow*, the accidental Indisposition they are under to the Duties of Religion, is not to be charg'd upon the Nature of it, but upon themselves.

And yet, even such Persons, if they will sincerely endeavour to subdue their evil Habits, and  
turn

turn to God, may, by his Grace, renew themselves again unto Repentance. And tho' Repentance must be a Work of greater Trouble and Self-denial, especially, at the First, to such Penitents, than to those who have kept themselves from presumptuous Sins; yet the Trouble of it will not be without a great Degree even of present Ease and Satisfaction of Mind; and afterwards it will be abundantly compensated by the joyful Reports of Innocency and a good Conscience; but, especially, if God vouchsafe them, by the inward Delectations of his Grace.

Give me leave now to conclude with a Word or Two, from the several foregoing Heads, by way of Expostulation.

And *First*, Are the Laws of Religion reasonable in themselves? Let us then either follow them, or renounce Reason. As indeed every Sinner does; and therefore whatever Pretence he may make to Wit, or Learning, or the Wisdom of this World, yet his Character all along, with the wisest of Men, is Folly and Madness. And indeed, when he reflects upon his own Conduct, he must own the Character just; he cannot but know himself to be a Fool, and the greatest of Fools, as acting contrary to his Reason in those very Things which are of the last Importance and Consideration to him.

*Secondly*, Does the Practice of Religion conduce to the inward Peace and Satisfaction of our Minds? Why do we oppose our own Happiness? How strange is the Infatuation of Sin? How fraught with Contradiction? That it should make Men fly from the very Thing they invincibly desire, and *in general* pursue: For 'tis impossible



possible not to have an Inclination to be happy. But I have shewn, and every Man's Experience will tell him, that the Happiness he so impatiently thirsts after, is only to be found in the calm and peaceful State of his own Mind. But this is a Temper of Mind, which can only arise from a sincere and conscientious Regard to the Laws of God. Let us then, as we would be happy, consider those Things which belong unto our Peace, and follow after them: Let us be strictly, and at all times, careful to please God, to keep Innocency, and do the Thing that is right: These Things, and these alone, will give us Peace here; and when we shall stand most in need of it, and all other Comforts will fail us, Peace at the last; at the Hour of Death, and in the Day of Judgment.

*Thirdly*, Have we indeed a Divine Principle to assist us in the Performance of our Duty? Are all our natural Weaknesses and Defects supply'd by a supernatural Power and Grace? Then we may be assured, tho' we had not a particular Promise of God for it, *that we shall never be tempted above what we are able; but that he will also, with the Temptation, make a way to escape.* Let us then, in all our spiritual Wants and Conflicts, be fervent in our Prayers to God for the Assistances of his Holy Spirit, and faithfully comply with them. Without our Endeavours indeed, our Prayers to God for his Grace, besides that they will be to no effect, are no other than meer Illusions; in all the good Offices the Holy Spirit does any Person, he still leaves him to his own Freedom and Choice, he draws him by the Cords of a Man; by such Motives and Arguments as are proper to work upon a reasonable  
and

and free Agent, not by the Chain of a *Stoical* Fate. No Christian must expect to be carry'd to Heaven as *Elijah* was by a Whirlwind, or the meer Force of Omnipotence, but by his own voluntary and free Obedience: This being indeed the Foundation of all Laws, and of all Rewards and Punishments.

*Fourthly and Lastly*, Besides all these Motives to Religion; has the good God still encourag'd us to the Practice of it by proposing to us the great and glorious Rewards of Eternity? Let us live as if we really believed them, and our Business is done; for 'tis impossible that any Difficulty should stand before a firm and steddy Belief of them. So the Apostle, with whose Words I shall conclude, thought, when he exhorted the *Corinthians* from a Consideration of the great Things God has promis'd in the Gospel to a sober, chaste, and holy Life. *Having therefore these Promises (dearly Beloved) let us cleanse our selves from all Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God. Amen.*

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TO THE

Most Reverend Father in God,

JOHN,

By Divine Providence

Lord Archbishop of YORK;

ONE OF THE

Lords of Her MAJESTY's most Honourable

PRIVY COUNCIL,

AND

Lord ALMONER.

May it please your Grace,

**I** Was determin'd upon many Accounts, to put this  
 Sermon under the Protection of Your great Name.  
 I could not but flatter my Self with the Hopes, that  
 the Nature and Design of my Subject would in some  
 Measure recommend the Performance, with all its De-  
 fects,

## DEDICATION. 331

fects, to Your favourable Acceptance. My Hopes were founded on that pious Veneration, which Your Grace retains for the Memory of our Royal Martyr : and the Justice You have done in Your admirable Discourse before the Lords on the same Occasion.

My LORD,

I was further encourag'd to do my self this Honour, from what I have here offer'd in Vindication of the moderate Principles of that Church, whose Interests You have so much at Heart, and espouse with a Zeal becoming a Father of it. Moderation is Your Grace's known Temper ; but your Conduct all along has taught us to put a difference betwixt the little Arts that go under the Name, and the true Notion of this Virtue.

The uniform Principle and Tenor of Your Actions, in the most dangerous Times, and the most difficult Trials, have eminently distinguish'd You in Your Character, both of a Pastor and a Patriot ; and render You a lasting Ornament to that High Post, in the Church of God, to which they first advanc'd You.

But, my Lord, I was principally drawn into this Presumption, by that Easiness of Access, and condescending Goodness, which You know so well to reconcile with Your high Station, and the Dignity of Your Order. The grave, affected Reservedness of some good Men, has brought Religion under a Suspicion of ingenerating such a Temper : Your Lordship has remov'd this Prejudice, and shown us how consistent the Graces of the Christian are with all the Beauties and Ornaments of Human Life.

And to whom, when we are unjustly charg'd, should our Appeal lye, but to one who has equal Candor to hear, and Courage to maintain our Cause ? And if Your Grace will pardon me, the most indisputed Abilities to determine it.

I say



# 332 DEDICATION.

*I say nothing, my Lord, but what my Heart is full of and what is every Moment said of You.*

*But I have too long diverted You from those weighty Cares wherewith You are taken up for our common Good; tho' the World will condemn me, when I am speaking of his Grace of York, should I make no mention of my Lord Almoner; and that celebrated, I had almost term'd it favourite Virtue, which Her Majesty had an Eye upon, when She Honour'd You with a Trust, so proper for the Exercise of it. This, my Lord, I know is a Subject, wherein You are best pleas'd with our Silence; and yet, I cannot but embrace so Publick an Occasion of acknowledging Your particular and undeserved Favours to,*

My LORD,

Your Grace's

Most Obedient;

Most Faithful,

And Humble Servant,

R. FIDDES.

S E R.

# S E R M O N XIV.

PREACH'D

January the 31st, 170 $\frac{3}{4}$ .

BEING

The Day on which the Anniversa-  
ry of the Martyrdom of King  
**CHARLES** the First, was  
then kept.

ECCLES. ix. 2.

*All Things come alike to all, there is one Event  
to the Righteous and to the Wicked; as is the  
Good, so is the Sinner, and he that sweareth,  
as he that feareth an Oath.*

**S**OLOMON in several Passages of this Book,  
brings in the Atheist arguing against the  
Fundamental Principles of Religion; which some  
Persons, and particularly those that oppugn the  
Doctrine of the Soul's Immortality, not duly at-  
tending to, have taken up Atheistical Objections  
for reveal'd Truths; and then endeavour'd to ob-  
trude them upon the World under that Notion.

But

But yet as to what the Preacher here and in other Places asserts, concerning the promiscuous Event of Things to wicked and good Men in this Life; 'tis not so material to enquire, whether he speak in his own or a borrow'd Person; for as to the Truth of the Assertion, we cannot deny, and we need not dissemble it; tho' there is no difficulty in Religion, which has given greater Pain to the Minds of good Men, or wherewith Infidels have insulted them more.

This is the Reason the Psalmist assigns, why Men in his Days encourag'd themselves in Wickedness; and made it a Question, not so much whether God had any Hand in the Administration, as the least Cognizance, or Perception of Human Affairs: And they say, *How doth God know? And is there Knowledge in the most High?* Psalm lxxiiij. 11. And on the same Occasion, Job represents Sinners openly decrying Religion, and dissuading themselves and others from the Practice of it. *What is the Almighty that we should fear him? And what Profit should we have if we Pray unto him?* Job xxj. 15. And it must be own'd, both these holy Men themselves were sometimes provok'd to charge God foolishly, when they observ'd the Prosperity and Impunity of the Wicked, and the Sufferings and Misfortunes of other Men. Job xxxiv. 9. xxxv. 3. Psalm lxxiii. 13. 14.

In discoursing therefore upon the Words, my Business shall be,

- I. To consider the Force of this Popular Objection, concerning Providence: And,
- II. To show that 'tis of no Consequence to overthrow the Belief of a Providence.

And

And *First*, 'Tis here objected, that all Persons indifferently take their Turns in the Vicissitude of Human Affairs; that the Blessings and Evils of this Life seem to be scatter'd, as it were, with a careless Hand; no visible Regard being had in the distribution of them, to the Sins or Virtues of Men.

And this Observation is founded on the final Issue, as well as on the ordinary Course and Accidents of Human Life. Wicked Men do not only enjoy in common the Advantages of this World, and swim in a continued flow of Prosperity and Success, but go down to their Graves with all the Signs of Peace and Security; at least without any remarkable Denunciation of God's Displeasure against them. On the other hand, the best of Men are expos'd to Conflict all along with insuperable Difficulties and Misfortunes; till in the end they are crush'd under the weight of them, and their last and concluding Scene of Life is the most Melancholy and Dismal of all. This is what the Author of my Text more particularly complains of, *Chap. vij. 15. There is a just Man that perisheth in his Righteousness, and there is a wicked Man that prolongeth his Life in his Wickedness.* Accordingly it is represented in the Book of Wisdom, as the great Matter of Triumph and Raillery to the Libertines of that Age; that they observ'd the End of good Men to be without Honour. Tho' whatever Indignities an innocent Person might suffer in this Life, they had the Ingenuity to confess and applaud the Justice that is commonly done to his Memory; *How is he numbered with the Children of God? And his Lot is among the Saints.*  
Wisd.



# 336 S E R M O N XIV.

Wisd. v. 5. But to give still greater Force to the Objection, the Preacher in the following Words, puts a Case wherein, upon supposition of a Divine Providence, there is the greatest reason imaginable to expect the interposal of it.

That wicked and good Men in general should promiscuously share the Success and Disappointments of Life, may be accounted for: But that *he that sweareth* should be as *he that feareth an Oath*; that there should be no particular Exception made, with respect to Perjury, or the most scandalous Profaneness, seems to be the greatest Difficulty of all.

For an Oath, of all the Acts of Religion, is the most solemn and special Appeal to the Justice of Heaven; the best Security of the Publick Peace, and the Civil Rights and Interests of private Men; the last Expedient that can be found out for the Decision of Judicial Proceedings: And therefore one would think the Providence of God more peculiarly concern'd to punish the Violation of it, both for the Vindication of his Honour, and the good Order and Government of the World.

And yet the Wise Man here observes, and the Observation holds still good, that there are Sinners even of this Denomination, who have here no distinguishing Mark of the Divine Vengeance set upon them; but are rather considerable for the Advantages and Superiority of their Condition.

I need not go so far back as to those Times of Distractions, which occasion'd the sad Solemnity of the Day, when the very first Step to Preferment was Treason and Perfidiousness:

When

When the lowest of the People were screwed up, by the Help of these State-Engines, to the highest Posts of Profit and Power; and permitted to Lord it, in the most Arbitrary and Insolent Manner, over those, whose *Fear of an Oath* kept them within the Bounds of their Duty and Allegiance.

But that which still heightens the Horror of a Crime, flamingly impious in it self, was their Baptizing it in the Name of the Lord; their entering into solemn Leagues and Covenants to confirm their Breach of Faith, and justifying their Conduct, upon Pretence of Law and Religion, I had almost said *Moderation*.

Neither can I here omit what the Earl of *Clarendon*, in his Admirable History of those Times, so justly remarks, and is transported with a more than ordinary Indignation at the Thoughts of; That Men, by their Profession Ministers of Peace, were the great Incendiaries of that Civil and Rebellious War, which brought our Royal Martyr to the Block; and to the end they might more effectually persuade the People, that they were absolv'd from their Oaths of Fidelity to him, prophanely calculated all the Prophecies, which concern'd the impious and idolatrous Kings of *Israel*, for his Reign; by this Means the pretended Cause of God was back'd with his full Powers and Commission; and what was obscure or defective in the Old Prophets, was supply'd by New Visions and Revelations.

Good God! that ever Men, out of what they call Zeal for Religion, should do things so contrary to Knowledge and the Nature of it: That they should burlesque thy Oracles, and pretend thy Sovereign Empire over their Consciences, to

authorize the greatest and most scandalous Impieties; and yet after all this open Defiance of thy Vengeance, thou should'st still bear with them, and with-hold thy avenging Hand.

But we have Facts of a fresher Date, to show us how easy of Digestion Oaths are to tender and scrupulous Consciences; and how many that strain at the Gnat of a Ceremony, can swallow the Camel of deliberate Perjury.

If this Charge be just, they who are concern'd in it, must own we have Reason for our severest Resentments, and make it good against those who conform no longer to our Church, than they have qualify'd themselves for their respective Employments. I only desire it may be granted, that all Tests are to be taken in the plain Sense and Design of the Imposers.

Now let any one judge, whether Conformity to our Church can, with any Propriety, be denominated from a single, and, in effect, *forc'd* Act of Communion? Or whether our Legislators could be suppos'd to intend no more by it? Nay, whether they have not left Men, notwithstanding the Test of Conformity, entirely at Liberty, both by their Discourses and Practices, openly to decry the Terms of it? Upon this Supposition, I may challenge all the Nations upon Earth, to produce a Law, which has so little Appearance of Reason or Design in it. Till therefore it can be made out, that the Legislative Authority of *England*, upon a Time, made a Law, which had no wise, or rather no manner of End in it, except it were to encourage the most solemn Act of Hypocrisy, which the Wit of Man can possibly devise, I do not see how those, against whom the Charge is exhibited, can evade it.

But

But if the Sacramental Test (as certainly it was, if we would account for the Reason or Wisdom of it) were impos'd in favour of the Church of *England*; the Honour and Interest of our Church are so far from being advanc'd by such Persons as never come, but when they are in a manner drag'd to our Altars, that nothing can cast a greater Scandal or Reproach upon her: Men will be apt to think very contemptibly of an Ecclesiastical Establishment, which can no longer detain People in its Communion, than they have serv'd a present Turn by it. The Honour such Communicants do the Church of *England*, is much like that the Heathens of Old paid to *Hercules*, the Solemnity of whose Worship consisted in throwing of Stones, and in using bitter Outcries and Execrations against him.

It would without question make much more for the Authority and Reputation of the Church of *England*, that Men were not admitted within the Pale of it, than that they should be suffer'd to skip over it at every turn, by way of more open and publick Contempt.

And then, as to the Interest of our Church, we in particular of the Clergy seem to lie under very great Disadvantages, in being oblig'd (it may be, under the Penalty of making them Compensation for the Loss of their Places) to admit Persons to Communion, who are declar'd by our Canons *ipso facto*, excommunicated. I know it is pretended, that besides these Declarations of the Canons concerning avow'd Schismatics, a Judiciary Sentence is required in order to a formal Excommunication; tho' where the Notoriety of the Fact is evident, one would



think the Reasons of things should oblige the Conscience without Matter of Form.

This we are sure of, that Schism does in its own Nature, and I conceive in the Opinion of Dissenters themselves, render Men very unworthy to approach the Table of our Lord. None are more nicely scrupulous, or pretend to be so, in enquiring into the Qualifications of Communicants, than they. But it appears the Christian World has for so many Ages been quite out in the Notion of Schism, and that the Fathers in their numerous Polemick Writings upon this Article fought all along in the dark; and had the Misfortune at every turn, out of too forward a Zeal, to fall foul upon their Friends, instead of their Enemies: 'Tis now at last discover'd, that Men may disobey the lawful Ecclesiastical Authority which is set over them, and cause Divisions in a Christian and legally constituted Church, without incurring the Guilt of Schism; which is as much as to say, *That Christians may walk by the same, tho' they go by a different Rule; or, That we may rend the seamless Coat of Christ without tearing it.* Men that argue at this rate, seem admirably qualify'd to unfold the Mysteries of Transubstantiation, and to demonstrate how a thing may be, and may not be at the same time, and under the very same Habitues and Respects.

Upon both these Considerations, I will be bold to conclude, that there is no Dissenter has so just Grounds of Scruple against the Terms of our Communion, as every Clergyman in the Church of *England* has against admitting a known Dissenter to communicate with us; especially one who comes with a fix'd Design to

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# SERMON XIV. 341

conform no longer than comports with his Interest ; and who in effect (it may be in plain Terms) gives us to understand, that were it not for the Support of himself and his Family, he would abhor the Thoughts of partaking with us in our Antichristian and Superstitious Rites of Worship.

Whether such a Person be duly qualify'd and dispos'd to receive the Holy Sacrament, is left to our own Conscience and Determination ; but in Case we should refuse to Administer it to him, the Law is open for him ; and I know of no Provision that is made to indemnify us. Now if in imposing Penalties, Regard ought to be had to the Scruples of Men, one would think an equal Tenderneſs at least should be shown to those of the Establish'd Church, whose Scruples are founded upon so great Appearances of Reason and Conscience.

And yet, after all the heavy Complaints made against us, we seem to lie under greater Hardships, as the Case stands, than those who dissent from us.

'Tis true, under a Reign where Men of Probity and Merit, and known Affection to the Church of *England*, are declar'd the peculiar Objects of Royal Favour, we have not so just Apprehensions of Danger on this Account ; but yet with Submission, while our Adversaries are continually undermining us, and flattering themselves with the Hopes of new Revolutions ; it were to be wish'd, that we had standing Laws to secure and protect us in the Discharge of our Functions, and a good Conscience.

It would lead too far beside the Design of my Argument, to consider the Scandal of that Pra-

Etice I am speaking to ; tho' I cannot but observe, that those Persons, who have been so noisy and clamorous upon this Head against the Church of *England*, should give us so fair an Opportunity of turning their own Weapons upon them. If Things, tho' lawful in themselves, which at present we will admit Occasional Conformity upon Secular Views, may not be continued in the Practice of, when they give publick Occasion of Offence, both to the Weak and the Strong, and Persons of all Distinctions : I desire to know, whether there has ever been any thing in the Church of *England* more openly complain'd of, as Scandalous or Dishonourable to Religion, or with more Reason.

But it seems, the Interests of Men may alter the Nature of Things ; and those Arguments may be good against the Church of *England*, which, in a suppos'd Change of the Case, will not affect the Dissenters from it ; tho' for this Reason perhaps the good old Puritanical Questions concerning *Scandal* have been drop'd of late, and probably we may hear no more of them from that Quarter.

And yet, to do Justice to some of the most Judicious among the Dissenters, it must be own'd they have ingenuously declar'd their just Abhorrence of a Practice so highly criminal in it self ; but much more, when Men, to serve a Turn, bind themselves to it by solemn Tests, against the direct Intention and Reason of them.

I know Discourses of this Nature are apt to bring us under the Suspicion of a persecuting Spirit, and Want of Moderation. And this indeed were an intolerable Reproach and Scandal to the Disciples of the Prince of Peace, could we

# SERMON XIV. 343

we once live to see Things and Persons call'd by their right Names. Yet we ought not to be much concern'd at Invectives of this Kind, while the World is govern'd by a Set of popular Terms, without having any true or determinate Ideas ordinarily affixed to them; such are those of Superstition, Priest-craft, Passive-Obedience, Innovation, High Church-Men, and the like. Which when our Adversaries explain what they mean by, the Answer to them is very easy; but with the Populace, general Charges frequently go for just Reasonings, and those who have accusom'd themselves to Rail more than to Reason, understand this too well, not to make their Advantage of it.

If by Moderation be intended, that we ought in Favour of a powerful Faction, to confound the Notion and Nature of Things, and call them by different Names from what they properly import; if, for fear of offending peevish and unreasonable Men, Hypocrisy and the Breach of the most solemn Engagements may be reconcil'd with Tendernefs of Conscience, and from a little thing Schism dwindle to nothing; in a word, if we understand by it mean and popular Condescensions in Favour of corrupt Practices, or a servile betraying the Cause of Truth and Piety to the Iniquity of the Times; if, I say, the Virtue of Moderation lies in these Things, there is no true Son of the Church of *England*, but ought to glory in having the Want of this Virtue imputed to him. But if by Moderation be meant a just Tendernefs and Compassion towards those that are in Error, or even a publick Allowance of them in the Exercise of their Religion, according to the sincere Dictates of their



## 344 S E R M O N XIV.

Conscience, so far as they keep within their Bounds, and be not permitted to break in upon the Order, and disturb the Peace of the Establish'd Church; if this be the Notion of Moderation, I know no Church upon Earth, wherein the Virtue of it has been more conspicuous, than in the Church of *England*.

There is nothing that I abhor more, or I think upon better Grounds, than Persecution for Conscience-sake. But the Arguments for Liberty of Conscience are to be managed with Caution, lest they prove too much: 'Twill be hard to deny that Liberty to the Sovereign Power, which is contended for in the People; and if the Consciences of those, who are invested with the Legislature, dictate to them, that they ought to suppress all Schismatical Assemblies for Divine Worship; why, they seem to be under an Obligation to do it upon the Principles of the Dissenters themselves. 'Tis in vain to pretend, that the Supreme Authority acts herein upon an erroneous Conscience; for so do all Dissenters that make this Plea, in the Opinion of one another.

I know no Rule to extricate us out of this Difficulty, but that Liberty of Conscience is no longer to be tolerated, when it puts Men upon ill Measures, destructive of the common Happiness and Welfare of Society; and then I think all Governments are particularly concern'd to provide, that all publick Tests be religiously observ'd; and that, under Pretence of Conscience, Men do not render them cheap and contemptible.

And indeed, what Measures are to be taken with those, who do not act conformably to the publick

publick Faith they have given the State, is properly a State Question. The Church of *England* is no more concern'd in it, than with what is to be done with Criminals and Civil Delinquents; who have the same Pretence to join in the common Cry of Persecution, with Men whose corrupt Practices the Wisdom of the Government may think fit to restrain by proper and effectual Penalties.

'Tis upon this Ground we justify the Severity of the Penal Laws against the Papists, that the Fundamentals of Popery are thought inconsistent with the Nature and Safety of the Civil Establishment; and I do not see why Men, who act upon the worst of Popish Principles, should complain of hard Usage for being put under some convenient Restraints, tho' they call themselves Protestants. The Security of the State does not depend upon Names and Distinctions of Men, but upon the Reason of Things; and the playing fast and loose with Oaths and Religious Tests, does equally tend to subvert the Foundations of Civil Government in Persons of all Persuasions.

I have the longer insisted upon this Charge, at once to vindicate the moderate Principles of our Church, and her Genuine Sons, from the malevolent Aspersions of their Enemies; and withal to show, that there is a Revolution of the same State of Affairs *Solomon* observed in his Days, with respect to the Impunity of a Crime, upon which he founds the main Force of the Objection I propos'd to consider.

But *Secondly*, If by Swearing be here understood the common and customary Use of Oaths in Conversation; next to the deliberate Violation  
of

of them, what higher Indignity can we be suppos'd to put upon the Deity? And yet we do not find, that habitual and prophane Swearers are punish'd by any stated or determinate Judgments of Heaven in this World, but are many times distinguish'd by the Splendor of their Condition, and seated at the upper End of it. The Prophet observ'd of the Debauchees in his Age, *That the Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine, were in their Feasts*, Isaiah v. 12. And this is frequently the Scene of the Swearer, as well as the Sot: And indeed, when a Man has turn'd himself into a Beast, 'tis no Wonder he loses that awful Sense of a Deity and Religion, which distinguishes him from one; and yet this scandalous and abusive Treatment of the Name of God, is not always the Effect of a disorder'd Brain: But 'tis the more unaccountable that Men, who have not quite lost the Use of their Reason, should be guilty of so very absurd and senseless a Crime.

But 'tis to be hop'd, this flaming Impiety is not so common among us as formerly. Those who think themselves above the Restraints of Religion or the Laws, yet out of Respect to the Measures of Decency in Conversation, are generally asham'd of a Language, which no good Man can hear without being affronted; nor, if he have the least Spirit, without shewing his Resentments.

So that this rude unmannerly Vice, in an Age of so much Politeness, is scarce any where to be met with but among Rakes or Clowns, or the young, raw, thoughtless Beaus. Your Libertines, that are in any Measure fit for Human Society, think themselves concern'd, in Point of  
Repu-

# S E R M O N XIV. 347

Reputation, to forbear a Dialect equally irreconcilable with the Character of a sensible, and of a well-bred Man.

*Secondly*, Thus having laid the Stress upon this popular Objection concerning Providence, which it will bear, I proceed in the next Place to shew, That it is of no Consequence to overthrow the Belief of a Providence.

I shall only premise, that what *Solomon* here asserts, is not to be understood so universally, as the Terms import. The Principles of Religion are so well supported, that when the inspir'd Pen-Men represent to us the Objections of Infidels against it; they are not afraid of urging them in a Hyperbolical Strain, beyond the Evidence of plain and undeniable Facts. Thus the Prophet *Jeremiah* on the same Occasion, elegantly expostulates; *Righteous art thou O Lord! when I plead with thee, yet let me talk with thee of thy Judgments. Why doth the Way of the Wicked prosper? Why are all they Happy that deal very Treacherously*, Jer. xii. 1. The Equity of God's Proceedings is founded in the Perfections of his Nature, and might be accounted for, from the Retributions of another Life; tho' all wicked Men were (what 'tis evident they are not) happy in this; and therefore the Prophet puts the Question further than the Atheist himself could have done, but which, without shaking the Foundations of Religion, may be admitted.

And yet, to awaken and awe us into a more just Sense of his Providence, God does, in a remarkable manner, frequently exert his Power, and make himself known by the Judgments which he executes upon Sinners in this World.

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# 348 S E R M O N XIV.

The Records of all Ages and Places inform us, after what a surprizing providential Manner, the pernicious Counsels of wicked Men, in order to embroil or subvert Civil Government, have been brought to Light, and timely frustrated: How often God Almighty has thunder'd from Heaven, and made bare his Arm in the Punishment of Perjury and Murder: And how many by sudden, and, in all Appearance, very improbable Accidents, have been blown up by their own Trains, and made the just and publick Examples of those villanous Designs they had form'd against other Men. 'Tis in this Case the *Psalmist* particularly calls upon us to acknowledge the Interposition of Heaven; *The Lord is known by the Judgment which he executeth; the Wicked is snar'd in the Work of his own Hands*, Psal. ix. 16.

These notorious Revenges of Divine Providence, frequently occur; tho' God for wise Reasons, may suspend them a long time. Those who imbrued their Hands in the Blood of our Royal Martyr, were permitted some Years to triumph in a Villany, which we cannot think of without Horror: But the slow Vengeance of Heaven was sure at last; and many of them were brought to a condign Punishment by a Revolution, as signal as their Crimes had been; a Revolution, which had the more of the *no Ovis* in it, if we consider that it was not brought about by any considerable Party among those who were in the Administration of Affairs; but by a strange Infatuation of their Councils, and by a general Awe and Impression of their Duty upon the Hearts of the Populace towards their injur'd Prince. This, I say, made it eminently  
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appear to be the Work of that God who stilleth the *Raging of the Sea*, and the *Madness of the People*, and who maketh even a Man's Enemies to be at Peace with him.

So that as to the Truth of the Thing, it cannot be deny'd, that wicked Men do frequently meet with the just Recompence of their Actions in this World ; and particularly with respect to perjur'd Persons, whose Impunity seems the most difficulty reconcileable with a Providence ; besides, what I observ'd before, that God does often in this World remarkably interpose in their Detection and Punishment. He charges his Providence in a peculiar Manner, and with Circumstances of Solemnity, to visit their Sins upon their Posterity, *Zach. v. 4.* the Prophet representing the Curse of Thieves and Swearers by the Metaphor of a flying Roll, has these Words, *I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of Hosts, and it shall enter into the House of the Thief, and into the House of him that sweareth falsely by my Name ; and it shall remain in the midst of his House, and shall consume it with the Timber thereof, and the Stones thereof.* So that except God Almighty would over-rule the Wills of Men, by an omnipotent Power, in order to preserve the Sacredness and Authority of an Oath, what is more likely to deter them from the Violation of it, than that if they escape with Impunity here, they shall entail a Curse upon their Estates and Families, and themselves hereafter ? And as eminently has the Providence of God appear'd in Favour of good Men, as in the Punishment of the Wicked ; by protecting them from impending and visible Dangers, when they have had no Human Prospect of Deliverance, or by over-ruling the Designs of their Enemies,

Enemies, when they had just brought them to bear, to their Advantage and Honour. Thus were *Joseph*, *Mordecai*, and *Daniel* advanced to the highest Dignities and Posts of Trust, by those very Means which were intended, and which were in all Probability likely to ruin them.

Men are apt to impute Events of this kind to what we call Chance and good Fortune, to certain secret Powers of Nature, or the Influence of Celestial Configurations; and Judicial Astrology has been of very ill Use towards confirming the World (especially the Vulgar) in an Error, so derogatory to the Doctrine of a Providence, and the Practical Inferences from it. But where there is a continued Chain of surprising Accidents in the Fortunes of good Men, when Providence seems to lay a Plot for the Manifestation of it self, and carries them through great Variety of puzzling and intricate Scenes, 'till at last all is unravel'd, and the admirable Dependance and Turn of one Thing upon another, discover'd in order to a successful and happy Conclusion of Matters; here we are compell'd to acknowledge the Conduct and Wisdom of the Divine Author; and accordingly the Prophet particularly assigns this as a Reason why God does interest himself in the Protection of good Men, when they have no visible Means of Deliverance, and there is a *nodus vindice dignus*; that they may be hereby excited duly to reflect upon, and agnize his Power and Providence, *That they may see and know, and understand together, that the Hand of the Lord had done this, and the holy One of Israel hath created it, Isa. xli. 20.*

Having premised this, and said something in general as to the Impunity of those Sinners upon whom the Objection principally turns; I shall only at present, and that with all possible Brevity, endeavour to vindicate the Dispensations of Providence, with respect to the Sufferings of good Men. And,

*First*, God Almighty permits the Sufferings of good Men, for the Advancement of the Honour and Interest of Religion. A passive State is the proper Sphere of Action for the noblest Virtues of Christianity; and for this Reason the Son of God, when he took our Nature upon him, chose to appear in such a State, that his Example might be of more powerful and general Influence to Mankind.

And indeed, next to the Miracles, whereby the Truth of the Christian Religion was establish'd, nothing contributed more to the Propagation and Growth of it than the invincible Patience and Constancy of its Professors: Men, against their settled Prejudices, became of a sudden in love with a Religion which appear'd so Graceful and Charming, under all the Disadvantages of Poverty and Distress.

We are all of us apprehensive, that 'tis our indispensable Duty to be of an humble, resign'd, and forgiving Temper of Mind: But let us fancy to our selves a most excellent Prince in the Hands of his Rebellious Subjects, treated with the utmost Contempt their Wit or Malice could contrive, and which it is not decent to mention, and at last condemn'd to die before his own Doors, with all the mock Formalities of Law and Justice: Let us imagine, I say, to our selves, a Prince under these Circumstances, and yet behaving



having himself with a dispassionate Composure and Tranquility of Mind, and such an eminent Example of these Virtues will more effectually recommend them to us, than all the Rhetorical Schemes and Arts of Persuasion in the World. Nothing we can do after this deserves the Name of Patience or Humility.

*Secondly*, God has this further Wise and Religious End, in the Sufferings of good Men ; that we may learn by them to moderate our Affections to this deceitful World ; and to cast our Views forward upon a more durable State of Happiness, and better suited to the noble Faculties and Inclinations of Human Nature. This, indeed, is an Improvement which we may make of the daily Occurrences of Life. But when we see the best and greatest of Men involv'd in the common Calamities of it ; when, as the Wise Man observes, *Chap. x. 6, 7. Folly is set in great Dignity, and the Rich sit in low Place ; when we see Servants upon Horses, and Princes walking as Servants upon the Earth* : Such signal Instances of the uncertain Turns and Changes of the World, cannot but operate with great Force and Efficacy, and make us reflect on those future Expectations we were born to attain.

*Thirdly*, The Sufferings of good Men are design'd to remind us both of our Duty and our Danger. When 'tis observ'd, that *the Righteous fall and no Man layeth it to Heart* ; 'tis imply'd, that this is a proper Season of enquiring into the Occasions of God's Publick Judgments, and reforming those Sins which provok'd him ; and this is the more incumbent upon us, in Proportion to the Dignity of the Person, and the Character he sustains. If God do at all concern himself

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in the Government of the World, those who are the first Ministers of his Kingdom, and sit at the Helm of Affairs, must be suppos'd the more immediate and peculiar Objects of his Providence. *For the Transgressions of a People, says Solomon, Many are the Princes thereof.* But there is much greater Cause to reflect on our Transgressions, when we our selves become the mad Instruments of our own Punishment and Ruin; when we anticipate the Vengeance of Heaven upon a sinful Nation, in the violent and barbarous Death of good Princes. And was not this really our Case? Had not Providence set a Prince over us, whose Piety and Fortitude were objected to him by his Enemies as his greatest Crimes; in that he could not be prevail'd upon, out of any Apprehensions of Danger to himself or his Family, to recede from his Religion, or the Trust repos'd in him; to act below the Character of a Christian, or a King? And can the unjust Sufferings and Death of so excellent a Prince be laid too much to Heart? Do not we still feel and lament the unhappy Consequences of them? Particularly, the sending the Princes of the Blood of *England* to beg their Bread in a Foreign Land; and to imbibe the Religion and State-Principles of *France*.

But 'tis pretended, that the Observation of the Day tends only to keep up the Distinction of Parties, and to perpetuate the Dishonour of those Families which were engag'd in the Rebellion.

To which the Answer is not very difficult; 'tis fit those Persons who applaud or approve that horrid Fact, the Day is appointed as a Memorial of, should have a Mark of Distinction set upon them. And as to those whose Parents or near Relations espous'd the Rebel Cause, the Argu-

ment will hold as well against the Histories of those Times ; and indeed, if there be any weight in it, all the Historians in the World have been very culpable, in transmitting to us the Memory of villanous Actions and ill Men.

The best way for Men to retrieve the Honour of their Families, is by an open and ingenuous Acknowledgment of their Crimes ; especially when the Wisdom of the Government thinks fit to appoint solemn and proper Times of Humiliation for them. Where Men slight or ridicule such Institutions, 'tis to be presum'd that they are act'd still by the same Principles, and are restrain'd by nothing, but want of a favourable Opportunity, from engaging in the same Practices.

*Fourthly*, There is no Man so good, but he is conscious to himself he deserves what he suffers. The World perhaps cannot charge him with any visible or notorious Escapes ; yet he need only put the Question to his own Heart, concerning the Reasons of his Sufferings, and it will acquit the Justice of Heaven in them. The secret Motives and Views upon which we act, do very much alter the Nature and Quality of our Actions ; as when we are induc'd out of some By-End of Interest, or an Inclination to oblige other Men, to do Things against the Dictates of our own Reason and Conscience. This seems to have been what our Royal Martyr lamented in such elegant Strains of Sorrow as his great Offence ; his sacrificing an innocent Person, or which was the same thing to him, one that he thought to be so, to a popular Odium.

Had we no external Proofs to evince the Genuineness of that admirable Book which goes under his Name, the secret Testimonies and Convictions of Conscience, which occur in it, are suf-

sufficient to stop the Mouth of any one, who is not tinctur'd with the highest degree of Republican Fury or Fanatick Zeal ; except it could be made appear that the Hearts and inward Actings of the Minds of Men were known to Bishop *Gauden*, which some Persons will as soon believe, as that he was the Author of the *Εἰκὼν βασιλική*, or capable of writing five Pages in the Stile of it.

But, *Fifthly* and *Lastly*, That which after all we must resolve the Wisdom and Equity of God's Proceedings into, is the Day of his final Retributions in another Life ; wherein he will fully vindicate the seeming Inequality of his Providence in this World, and perfectly clear up all the dark and mysterious Passages of it. Upon this View, the Difficulties we raise concerning our own Sufferings, or those of other Men, are easily solv'd ; 'tis but a little Time, and these Storms will blow over, and be succeeded by a profound and eternal Calm. And if we at last gain Heaven and save our Souls, tho' with the Loss of every thing we so much set our Hearts upon here, I am sure the best of us will have no Reason to complain.

'Twas this Prospect that inspir'd our Royal Sovereign with so great Courage and Nobleness of Mind, and gave him the Crown of Martyrdom in exchange for one which he could not wear without parting with the brightest Jewels of it, his Integrity and his Honour. In a word, 'twas this so bravely supported him, tho' none was more sensible what it was to *Die*, against the Fears of Death ; and enabled him to undergo it with less Concern, than we can now think of it. And the same Consideration which supported him, will be the best Preservative to all of us against the calamitous Accidents of Life, and the Ap-



# 356 S E R M O N XIV.

prehensions of that mighty Change, upon which our true and supream Happines depends. Let us live so as to secure an Interest in the Divine Favour, and the Promises of a glorious Immortality, and we need not much concern our selves at what befalls us in a Life which is every Moment running off apace.

Accordingly, the Preacher having, after a very elegant and copious manner, represented to us the Vanity and Uncertainty of the gay Trifles of this World, comes in the Application to shew us wherein the true Felicity of Man consists, and that is, in being Religious, in fearing God, and keeping his Commandments. *Let us*, says he, *hear the Conclusion of the whole Matter; fear God and keep his Commandments, for this is the whole of Man*; not as it seems more improperly render'd *the whole Duty*, but the supream Happines and Felicity of Man, for that is all along the Subject of his Enquiry.

And then, lest any one should be discourag'd from the Practice of Religion, from what he had so often observ'd concerning the Sufferings of good and religious Men in this Life; he enforces his Advice with the Consideration of a Judgment to come, wherein Rewards and Punishments shall be dispens'd after another manner, and more exactly proportion'd to the Sins and Virtues of Men. *For God shall bring every Work into Judgment, with every secret Thing, whether it be good or bad, which that we may all live under a due Sense of, God of his infinite Mercy grant, through the Merits of that Son to whom he hath committed all Judgment. Amen.*

TO

TO THE  
 Reverend and Honourable  
 THE  
 DEAN of YORK;  
 AND TO  
 The Reverend and Honourable  
 Mr. FINCH.

**I** Was induc'd to publish the Sermon, I here humbly Present You, from the Variety of the useful Subjects which the Method led me to consider; and yet am sensible, it has many Defects, and that none can escape either of You; but the Best Judges are generally the most Candid and Favourable in the Judgments they make.

By others I am sure to be condemn'd, for prefixing the Name of FINCH to a Discourse, which has nothing of Eloquence, the known Character of that Noble Family, in it; and which has so often recommended it, to the First Posts in the Ministry at Home, and the Direction of the most important Negotiations Abroad.

But that, Gentlemen, which I know You most Delight to hear of, is the Constant and Shining Zeal of Your Father's House for the Church of England; That Excellent Church! which it has on all Occasions stood up for, and vigorously oppos'd the Enemies of.

'Twas in the Motion which that Zeal inspir'd, that You both enter'd into the Ministerial Office. You thought,

# 358 DEDICATION.

too justly, to be mislead into a Popular, but very Groundless Error, that the Character of a Clergy-man is a Diminution to a Noble Birth: But the true Reason, why more Persons of Quality do not take that Character upon them, is, That it Obliges them to a greater Regularity and Strictness of Life. How well You consider'd this Reason, before You devoted Your selves to the more immediate Service of God, Your Regular and Just Conduct since has sufficiently Demonstrated.

Religion needs nothing to recommend it to Judicious and Considerate Persons; The reasonableness of its Precepts, and the Beautiful Order and Disposition of all its Parts, are very engaging to Attentive Minds; but to those who want Attention or Strength of Mind, the Reasons and Beauty of it are never so Powerful, as when they are set off with a Sensible and External Lustre.

It were therefore to be wish'd that other Persons of Distinction would follow an Example, which has been so far from lessening Your Character in any Respect, that it has given You a Higher and more Advantageous Post in the Minds of all Wise and Good Men.

It was, Mr. DEAN, an Inducement to Her Majesty to place You in one of the most Considerable Stations of the Church, which you fill so well, and with so general Applause.

And no doubt, Sir, but as Your Honourable Brother, has quitted so Many and Just Expectations from the State, for the Service of the Church, his many Excellent Qualifications will be consider'd here; he is sure, they will not fail to receive a Due Reward in another World.

I am,  
GENTLEMEN,  
Your most Obedient  
Humble Servant,  
R. Fiddes.

# SERMON XV.

Preach'd to the

## CRIMINALS

I N

YORK-Castle, July 4. 1708.

PRINCIPALLY

On Occasion of the Murder of Major  
THOMAS FOVLKS.

PROV. xvij. 14.

*The Spirit of a Man will sustain his Infirmary;  
but a wounded Spirit who can bear?*

**B**Y the *Infirmary of Man*, we sometimes understand the Frailty or Defects of his deprav'd Nature; but as it is here oppos'd to a wounded Spirit, it signifies not any Moral, but some external Evil, or Evils; whereby God is pleas'd to correct and chastise the Sins of wicked Men, or to exercise the Faith and Vertues of good Men in this World.



And there are very wise and strong Reasons, upon which the *Spirit of a Man* may sustain, or bear him up with Courage and Resolution, under all Infirmities of this kind, from a Consideration of the Wisdom, and Goodness, and Justice of Divine Providence; of the uncertain Turns and Revolutions of Human Affairs; and the Certainty of that future State, which immortal Souls were design'd to attain.

Besides, that some Persons have a natural Firmness, or Strength of Mind, which is not easily broken; and which prepares them, not only to combat with the greatest Difficulties, but to conquer and surmount them. But then with respect to the inward Troubles and Disorders of a guilty Mind, the Case is very different; that very Reason which Supports the *Spirit of a Man*, under external Evils and Afflictions, serves here to inflame the Disease, and give him a more quick and pungent Sense of his Pain; for the more and better a Sinner Reasons, the more he will still be ashamed, and vex'd, and confounded at his Sins.

*But a wounded Spirit who can bear?*

And these are the Words I design for the Subject of my following Discourse; and I am sorry there is so sad an Occasion for a Subject of this Nature, particularly with respect to One of you, who, I charitably believe feels the Pains of a wounded Spirit in a very sensible Manner; I am sure both the Nature and Circumstances of his Crime, require him to do it.

I shall discourse upon the Words in the following Order,

I. I shall enquire what is here meant by a wounded Spirit.

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II. Why

II. Why it is so grievous and insupportable.

III. I shall shew, that tho' the Condition of a Person afflicted with it, is very deplorable, yet it is not hopeless or desperate; there are still, by the Grace of God, Means, if he do but rightly apply them, left for his Recovery.

IV<sup>thly</sup> and Lastly, I shall conclude all with a Word or Two by way of Direction to your Consciences, in the Application of those Means. And,

I. By a wounded Spirit, we are here to understand, a guilty and self-condemning Conscience, arising both from a Sense of Sin, and of the Danger which a Man by Sinning has brought himself into; *of his Sin*, in offending against the Light and Conviction of his own Mind; and against the Majesty of a good and gracious God; and *of his Danger*, in provoking the Justice of an angry and avenging God, not only with respect to the final and terrible Executions of his Wrath upon Sinners in another World, but to the present Punishments they justly suffer, or incur in this World.

For tho' this Life is not the proper State of Rewards and Punishments to Men, but of Trial and Probation; yet on some special Occasions, where his own Honour, or the good Order and Government of the World are more immediately struck at, God is pleas'd in a more loud and awakening Manner to thunder from Heaven, and *make himself known by the Judgment which he executes here* upon certain profligate and notorious Sinners, and therefore I shall consider the Terrors and Remorse of a wounded Conscience, both with regard to the future and present Sufferings it brings a Man under the Apprehensions of, or exposes him to.

H. I am to enquire why a wounded Spirit is so grievous and unsupportable. And that,

*First*, As it imports a *Sense of Sin*, in offending against the Light and Conviction of our own Minds. Reason is the Law of all intelligent Beings, God himself invincibly loves and follows it; the Happiness and Perfection of Angels and glorify'd Spirits consist in the Conformity of their Thoughts and Actions to it; and tho' blind Man is always roving Abroad in the Pursuit of sensible Pleasures and Delights, yet his true Happiness is not to be sought for from without, but within himself, in that Peace and Freedom, and Satisfaction of Mind, which as naturally flow from a reasonable, that is, a vertuous and regular Conduct, as Light from the Sun.

For God has so ordered it, and the Nature of Things requires, that we should be happy, in Proportion, as we act suitable to the noblest and most excellent Principle of our Being; and, on the other Hand, whenever we act contrary to the prime and essential Obligations of it, we are in an unnatural, and by a necessary Consequence, a disorder'd and uneasy State.

Upon which Account some have thought that a bare Sense of our having done what Reason and Order direct us to do, and of the Ease and Tranquility of Mind naturally arising from such a Conduct, is sufficient, if duly attended to, to oblige us to the Practice of Moral Virtues, without the Prospect of any other Reward.

There lie scatter'd up and down in the Writings of those Philosophers, who deny'd, or were not thoroughly convinc'd of the Providence of God, a great many fine Sayings to this Purpose; but 'tis not my Business to enquire at present

sent how far this Plea will hold ; the only Use I shall make of it is to observe to you, that Persons of all Religions, and of no Religion, are agreed in this, that there is a certain Principle in a Man, in acting conformably to which, the Peace and Perfection of his Mind do consist ; and which (if his natural Sense and Notion of Things be not altogether deprav'd) will severely check and rebuke him for the Disorders he is guilty of.

Those Crimes, especially, whereby Men offend against the strong and common Sentiments of Humanity ; against all the powerful Motives of Love and Gratitude to their Parents, their Masters, or Benefactors ; against the common Good and Welfare of Society, and the Civil Rights of their Neighbour ; these, I say, are some of those Crimes, which, if the natural Sense of Good and Evil be not wholly extinct in a Man, cannot but occasion him very great and troublesome Reflections ; so that even upon this Consideration of the natural Regret and Anguish, which they feel in their own Minds, *There is no Peace to the Wicked,* Isa. lvij. 21.

And therefore, in the foregoing Verse, the Prophet elegantly compares wicked Men to *the troubled Sea when it cannot rest, whose Waters cast up Mire and Dirt* : That is, they are in a continual Flux and Distraction of Thought, uncertain what Course to run, or where they shall turn themselves ; nothing arising in their Minds but black and dismal Clouds of Horror ; sometimes their Consciences are so full and overladen with Guilt, that they can find no Rest either to their Bodies or Minds, till they discharge and give them vent by confessing the *Fact* ; perhaps without any regard to the Consequence of their Confession, or so much as considering,



sidering, whether possibly it may not be prov'd upon them; *insomuch that their own Tongues shall make them fall.* This is frequently the Effect of that *Fear and Trembling which come upon Men, and of the horrible Dread which overwhelms them, when they reflect upon what they have done, in committing some very great and heinous Crimes.*

*Secondly,* As a wounded Spirit imports a *Sense of Sin*, in offending against the Majesty of a good and gracious God: The Power and Majesty of God are represented in Scripture as the great Motives to our Obedience, and they give him an unquestionable Right to it; but still that which occasions us the most sensible Trouble and Regret of Mind, when we offend against those who have an Authority over us, if we have but the least Ingenuity, is a Sense of *their Kindness and Beneficence towards us.*

'Tis to God we owe all that we have, and from him our Benefactors have received the very Capacity of obliging us; 'tis to him we are indebted for so many Mercies of Creation and Providence; *but above all for his inestimable Love in the Redemption of the World by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the Means of Grace, and for the Hope of Glory.* Shall we then affront and dishonour *so good, so gracious a God,* by our Sins and Impieties? Shall we thus requite *the Lord* for all the Benefits he hath done unto us? No, my Brethren, as nothing is more amiable, nothing more engaging than Goodness; so nothing is more enrag'd than Goodness provok'd and abus'd. Those particularly who despise that *Goodness of God, which should lead them to Repentance,* or encourage themselves from it in their Wickedness, with Hopes of Impunity, are said, in Terms very moving and significant, to *treasure up to themselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath,*

# S E R M O N XV. 365

*Wrath, and Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God, Rom. ij. 5.*

How many Persons have you known, the Thread of whose Life God has cut short, without their giving any visible Proof to themselves or others of the Sincerity of their Repentance, who yet probably at that time were not so great Sinners as your selves; and yet you have abus'd that further space of Time God has graciously given you for your Repentance, to his Dishonour, and your own Shame and Confusion; and it may be (to one of you, in all Human Expectation, it *will certainly be*) to your own present Death and Destruction.

And yet there is none of you perhaps, who, besides the ordinary Protection of God's Providence, and Means of Salvation, but may call to mind some special Deliverances, some favourable extraordinary Circumstances of Grace, and Calls to Repentance, in the Course of your Lives; and in Proportion to your Neglect or Abuse of these Mercies, your Guilt will, and should indeed lie more heavy and disquieting upon you.

*Thirdly,* As a wounded Conscience implies a *Sense of Danger* in provoking the Justice of an angry and avenging God; What a dismal and sad Thing is it, for a Man to be under the Apprehensions of being for ever excluded the Kingdom of Heaven, of being banish'd eternally from the Sight and Presence of that Glorious and All-perfect Being, in whom alone we can find that Happiness and Rest to our Souls which Nature so irresistibly prompts us to pursue? To think of being put under an endless and fruitless Despair of ever *seeing Light*, of having any Communion with God, with the Son of God, with the Holy Angels, or the Spirits of just Men made perfect? Such

Such Considerations as these, I say, and they are such as naturally arise and present themselves to a guilty Mind, are very terrifying and dreadful.

So dreadful indeed, that in the concurrent Opinion of the Fathers and Schoolmen, *the Pain of Loss*, the Sense of our being for ever debarr'd the Vision and Enjoyment of God, and that Happiness which 'twas once in our Power to attain, infinitely exceeds the most exquisite and eternal Pains of Hell.

And yet, to a guilty and accusing Conscience, the Pains of Hell too appear so intolerable and amazing, that they sometimes render Men incapable of all the Consolations of Reason and Religion, fill them with the Horrors and Despair, and at last, by the Artifice of the Devil, induce them to put a wretched and miserable Life, to a more miserable End, plunging themselves at once to the bottomless Gulf of Misery and Eternity.

*Eternity!* This is an awakening and weighty Consideration indeed to a wounded Spirit, for who can find out the Bounds, or fathom the Depth of it: A Drop of Water compar'd to the Ocean, or a Sun-Beam to the Universe, bears no Resemblance or Proportion to it; when we reflect upon this, when to the Idea of Misery we join that of Eternity, and yet are always walking upon the Brink of it, and in danger of being push'd every Moment by a Thousand unforeseen Accidents into it; how can a Sinner, while his Guilt is yet fresh in his Mind, and unrepented of, but be perplex'd and dismay'd at the Consideration of it; especially if his Prospect of Death, and the Judgment of God, be near and certain, by a due Execution of Justice upon him in this World?

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The best of Men cannot always so far free themselves from uncertain Doubts and Scruples, but the Thoughts of standing in Judgment, before a Just and All-powerful God, are sometimes very terrifying and uneasy to them. So that even under the comfortable and well-grounded Hopes of God's pardoning their Sins, through the Merits of Christ, *they rejoyce with trembling.*

No wonder then that great Sinners, and young Penitents, those I mean whose Repentance is only in its Infancy, and who have not had any long or sufficient Tryal of it, lie under some Diffidence and Anxiety of Mind. *Seneca*, speaking of wicked Men, lays it down as a Maxim, *tantum metuant, quantum nocent*; the Fears of wicked Men, says he, naturally arise in proportion to the Quality or Degree of their Guilt.

But there is a wide Difference betwixt the fine Sentences of a Philosopher, and the Truths of a Divine and infallible Revelation: The Proofs of Natural Religion concerning a Future State of Punishment to wicked Men are very strong; but, besides that all Persons are not capable of pursuing them, or reasoning exactly, a Divine Authority admits of no Dispute: If a Sinner feel no Forebodings or Natural Presages in his own Mind of future Punishment, or is incapable of drawing any just Consequences from them, he may see the Flames of Hell shining throughout the *New Testament*, the Law brought down from Heaven, and written with the Finger of God; he may there read his Doom, and what will be his certain and unavoidable Destruction, if he do not sincerely serve God, and discharge a good Conscience both towards God, and towards Man, in this Probationary State.

The Wrath of God is now reveal'd from Heaven



## 368 S E R M O N XV.

ven against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men; and the Expressions of his Wrath set forth and describ'd to us in such a manner, *by the never dying Worm, the Fire that is not quenched, and utter Darknes*, that the best of Men cannot think of them without Terror; Oh! what then will it be to the Wicked and Impenitent eternally to endure them?

I add, to the Impenitent; for I intend not by what has been said to raise any such Terrors in the Mind of a Sinner, as to overthrow the Grounds of his Faith, and Hope in the Divine Mercy; but only to lay open his Wounds, in order to the safer Healing of them; and that I may awaken his Conscience into such a just Sense of his Danger, as may effectually dispose him to repent sincerely and truly of his Sins.

But besides the Dread of future Punishment, I observ'd also that the Spirits of Men are often wounded, and their Thoughts afflicted, at a Sense of the present Shame or Sufferings, their evil Courses bring upon them: And is it not a very grating and grievous Reflection to a Man, to think, that by his own Fault, and scandalous Practices, he has brought himself to be a publick Example of the Justice of his Country? *That* the Society into which he was born, and which he might have been useful and serviceable to, looks upon him as a Traytor and common Enemy to the Interests of it, that ought to have some publick Mark of Infamy set upon him, and ought not perhaps to live? *That* he is become a common Spectacle of Hatred or Contempt, and a lasting Reproach to his Family and his Friends? *That* he shall leave a Disgrace behind him, which, by reason of the Heinousness of his Crime, may perhaps be transmitted throughout the Nation, and

and to succeeding Generations : And Lastly, *That* he shall be publickly sentenc'd and drawn to the Place of Execution, and there take a solemn and deliberate Farewel of the World, and prepare for immediate Death, in a perfect State of Health, and perhaps in the Vigour or Flower of Life? These Considerations, I say, tho' they are nothing in Comparison to what a wounded Conscience feels, under the Dread of God's future Wrath and Vengeance, yet it must be own'd, are very troublesome and disquieting:

And thus I have consider'd in general why a wounded Spirit is so grievous and insupportable; both with respect to a future and a present Account; but that I may render my Discourse as useful to you as possibly I can on this Occasion, I shall further observe to you some of those Crimes in particular, which, in their own Nature, are attended with more uneasy and stinging Reflections.

I. Of this kind especially are all publick Offences against Government, and the common Interest and good of Society. Such as counterfeiting the publick Stamp or Impression on any thing, thereby to give it a considerable extrin-sick Value, and render it Current, as if it bore the real Stamp of Authority. This is an Act of Injustice which spreads it self very wide; 'tis doing Wrong (besides the Treason and Injury to the Prince) to great Numbers of unknown Persons, without any Possibility of making them Reparation.

'Tis a deceitful Purpose of an after-Repentance, which betrays Men into most of the Disorders they commit; but 'tis hard to conceive how a Man can commit an Act of Injustice, with a design of repenting of it, when he is

assur'd before-hand he can never perform one of the necessary and essential Conditions of Repentance, or make Restitution for the Wrongs he has done.

I do not say, but that even such a Sinner may by an extraordinary Grace of God, be brought to such a Repentance, as will be accepted, tho' he is incapable of making Satisfaction to all those he had injur'd; but what I intend is, that a Person, the very Nature of whose Crime puts him out of all Capacity of performing one of the necessary Parts of Repentance, cannot be suppos'd to have committed such a Crime with an Intention of ever repenting truly of it; and that consequently when he committed it, he was under great Obstinacy, and Hardness of Heart, and could think of nothing but living and dying in a sinful impenitent State: All which are very high and strong Aggravations of his Guilt.

Publick Offenders against Government are also under the most fearful and uneasy Apprehensions of being discover'd; they *fly when no Man pursueth*; and tho', for some time they may escape Justice, yet they can never forbear imagining themselves in the Hands of it; and the Reason of their Fears is very obvious; for Government being the Institution of God, and the Power that supports it more immediately deriv'd from him, his Providence seems in a special manner concern'd to prevent all evil Practices and Attempts, which tend to the Dishonour or Destruction of it.

'Tis by God Kings Reign, and Princes Decree Justice; 'tis his Power they sustain, and by his Authority that they act; and therefore for the Vindication of his own Honour, he so seldom suffers the unjust Plots and Conspiracies of wicked Men

Men against well regulated Governments to succeed ; but how secretly soever they be laid or carry'd on, he always finds Means to frustrate or detect them, and sometimes after a very strange and surprizing manner, which plainly discovers it to be *his Doing*.

The Reason of God's watchful Care and Providence is proportionably the same, with respect to other treasonable Crimes, which, tho' they do not strike at the very Root of Government, yet affect the Publick Credit and Honour of it; such, as I said, is the Counterfeiting of any Publick Stamp, upon Things, that comparatively speaking, have no intrinsick Value, with a design to give them a current Value, and thereby to defraud and impose upon the State, and great Numbers of particular Persons.

'Tis in vain then, for Men who are guilty of such Publick and Treasonable Crimes, to flatter themselves with the Hopes of Secrecy or Impunity; the Eye of God, the Fountain of Authority, the *God of Order*, is always upon them. They can go no where *from his Presence*; by the Immenity of his Nature, he is present to all Places; by the Infinity of it, to all Times; and by his Omniscience, to all the Thoughts, Words and Actions of Men: No Doors or Walls, or private Apartments, can hide Sinners from his View; he sees through the darkest Recesses, and closest Cabals of wicked Men, and has infinitely more Ways of detecting them than they have of concealing or securing themselves. If they say, That *Darkness shall cover* their Designs; God, who observes them, by a Thousand unexpected or unforeseen Accidents, *can* bring them to light, and they can never be secure, that he will not: He has all the Matter and Motion, and



Hearts of Men in the World, at his Command ; he can make the nearest Accomplices of such Criminals, in whom they most confide, or themselves, the Instruments of their own Discovery ; and he often does interpose by such extraordinary and *particular Wills* : We are assur'd from his Power and Omniscience, that whatever Precautions are us'd he *may* do it ; and *State Criminals* have all the Reason in the World, from the regard he has to the Honour and Support of Civil Government, to believe that he *will* do it.

Another very heinous Crime, which renders Men liable to the present Execution of Justice is *Murder* ; a Crime which also more immediately strikes at the Honour and Authority of God ; this being the Reason upon which he prohibited it, *Gen. ix. 6. That in the Image of God, made he Man* ; as if to attempt the Life of a Man, had something in it peculiar, above all other Crimes, of a *Personal Violence* and Indignity offer'd to God himself.

'Tis the highest Act of Injustice we can do to Man, and which will admit of no Compensation ; for what can we give to a Man in exchange for his Life ? But the depriving him of his Life is not all, he may be in an unprovided or disorder'd Condition, with respect to the State of his Soul ; he may be under the Power of some irregular Passion or Inclination. The best of Men are not always upon their Guard, I am sure they have all reason to pray that God would deliver them *from sudden Death*, that they may have time to compose their Minds, and prepare their Accounts, and put themselves in the best Posture of dying they can. The People of some Nations are said to have a peculiar Art in poisoning by slow and gradual Advances ; in  
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this Case the sensible Decays of Nature, which a Man perceives within himself, from the secret Working of the Poison, may serve to admonish him of the Necessity of a speedy Repentance, and of making his Peace with God while he has yet Time and Opportunity: But for a Man in a perfect State of Health, or perhaps while he sleeps securely, and dreams of no such thing, to be hurry'd out of *this* World, by a sudden and violent Stroke, and to find himself at the Bar of God's Justice, without any particular Notice, or Preparation for his Tryal; this, tho' he be really a good Man (and 'tis to be hop'd God will make merciful Allowances for any present Indisposition he may be under) yet it is a very sad Consideration to the Person that commits the Murder upon him.

There are other considerable Circumstances which still heighten the Guilt of this Crime, as when the Person upon whom it is committed is distinguish'd by any eminent Qualities, which render him serviceable to his Country, or very useful in the particular Post he is in, and which, by long Experience, he may have acquir'd some peculiar Art and Dexterity in the Discharge of; as also when he has many Dependencies, when the Interests of several Persons lie in his Hands, and the Affairs of his Family or his Friends, are very much perplex'd and embarrass'd by the Suddenness of his Death.

There are also very aggravating Circumstances, with respect to the Person committing the Murder; as when it is the Effect not of a rash and sudden Passion, which disorders and confounds Reason, but of a deliberate and premeditated Malice; when the Sun not only goes down, but rises upon his Wrath; when he sleeps not till he has

*done Mischief*; when after he has had Time and Leisure to recollect himself, to consider of the great Sin and Danger of what he is going to do; and when after all the Checks of Conscience, and Recoilings of his *own* Blood at the Thoughts of shedding *another* Persons, he still obstinately, and upon mature Consideration, resolves to do it.

2. When he is under any Obligations of Love, Fidelity, or Obedience to the Person, whose Life he attempts, as all Servants *particularly* are, both by the Laws of Reason and Christianity, to their Masters; but still in a higher Measure and Degree to such of them as have been in some signal manner kind, and *tender*, and beneficial to them.

'Tis upon the Account of the heinous Nature of this Crime which yet receives a mighty Addition of Guilt from these or the like Circumstances attending it, *that* the Providence of God so seldom, if ever, suffers it to escape with Impunity; *that* the Blood of an innocent Person, is said by a peculiar and emphatical Phrase in Scripture, *to cry to Heaven for Vengeance, from the Ground*: That (*Deut. xix. 10.*) it is laid to the Charge of a whole Nation; That for this Reason the Murderer was to have no Benefit of the Cities of Refuge; but the *Elders of the City should send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the Avenger of Blood, and that their Eye should not pity him*, ver. 12, 13.

The provoking Nature of this Crime is such, that all Histories are full of the wonderful and surprizing Discoveries which the Providence of God has made of it, and which, to all considerate Persons, are of themselves an undeniable and convincing Proof of his Providence.

That common Saying among us, That Murder will out, seems to have been a Maxim of the most  
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rude and illiterate, as well as civiliz'd Nations: 'Twas upon this receiv'd Notion, that *the barbarous People*, as they are call'd of *Melita*, (Acts xxviii. 2.) when they saw the Viper upon *St. Paul's* Hand, concluded that he was a *Murderer*; *whom, tho' he had escap'd the Sea, the Vengeance of God would not suffer to live.*

Another, and the only Crime, I shall make any further mention of to you, at this time, which exposes Men to the Penalty of Human Laws, is *Theft*; which consists in forcibly, or surreptitiously, taking away another Man's Right; and which is so destructive of the Peace and Happiness of Society, that to prevent the ill Effects of it, the Wisdom of Humane Laws (and 'tis the proper Office of Wisdom to regulate the Measures of Punishment) has rendred it in many Cases Capital, and puts a Man to Death for Things, in Comparison, of little or no Value; and where the Law does not affect the Life of a *Rogue*; yet even for the most trifling Matters, it awards him some infamous Punishment, or publick Mark of Disgrace.

And indeed what is more disgraceful in its self, than to see a healthy, strong young Fellow, capable by his own Diligence or Industry, of living handsomly in the World, dragg'd to a Goal, and there laid in Irons, as unfit for Humane Society, because through Sloth or Idleness, he would not endeavour to maintain himself by his Labour, or through some other vicious Inclination, could not be content to live upon the Fruits of it; but must break open the Doors or Inclosure of his Neighbours, to supply his sinful Wants, by what they have acquir'd in the Sweat, perhaps of their Brows, and what is necessary to their own, or the Subsistence of their Families?



I need not represent to you, the Engagements either of natural Religion or Christianity, to Moral Justice and Honesty. The Sense of them is so deeply implanted in the Minds of Men, that some Persons have scarce any other Notion of Religion; they imagine, if they be but just and righteous in their Dealings, and endeavour to defraud no Body, they are very good Christians, and need not much concern themselves about other Parts of Religion. I do not mention such an impious Opinion by way of recommending it; but only to shew how strongly a Principle of Moral Honesty is engraven on the Hearts of Men; and how infamous and unworthy in the common Sentiments of Human Nature, all manner of Fraud and Violence, and in particular, Theft and Robbery, are.

But I need not say much to shew what Reproaches and Regret of Mind, a Person must needs be sensible of, who has committed, and is in danger of suffering for a Crime so odious to God, and so despicable in the Eyes of Men; and for which, if he have any Sense of Shame or Ingenuity, he cannot but very much abhor and despise himself.

Thus I have represented to you in general, why a wounded Spirit is so grievous and insupportable, and withal observ'd to you some of those Crimes in particular, which contribute to make it so. But shall we then give over a Person, who is afflicted with it, for lost? Is there *no Balm in Gilead, no Physician there* to assuage the Pains, or heal the Wounds of a troubled and guilty Mind? The Answer to this lies under the next and third Head of my Discourse, to which I now proceed, *viz.*

3. That tho' the Condition of such a Person  
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# S E R M O N XV. 377

is very deplorable, yet it is not hopeless or desperate; there are still, by the Grace of God, Means, if he do but rightly apply them, left for his Recovery. What those Means are, the Gospel alone inform us with any Certainty; for tho' Men might hope, in a Human Way of Reasoning, from the Mercifulness and Benignity of the Divine Nature, that God, upon the Prayers, and Humiliation, and Repentance of a Sinner, might be inclin'd to pardon his Sins, and receive him to favour; yet the pardoning Mercy of God being an Act of his Free-Will, and which no After-Obedience or Performances of sinful Men could oblige him to, nothing could certainly be known either of the Terms, or Possibility of the Sinner's Pardon, till God had reveal'd his Will concerning it.

This Revelation, to our unspeakable Comfort is made to us in the Gospel, and the great Reasons of our Acceptance and Reconciliation with God are there plainly declar'd to us, in such a manner, as the most refin'd Wit and Philosophy in the World could never have thought of; namely, That God has, thro' the sinless Obedience and Sufferings of Christ, *reconcil'd the World unto himself, not imputing their Trespases to them.* Who then, that has any regard to his own Happiness, who, that considers the Nature of Sin, and what it is to provoke a Just and Almighty God, would for a thousand Worlds quit *this sure Anchor of Hope* in the Divine Mercy, and have nothing to rely on, but some faint and doubtful Conjectures, that possibly after all, God *may*, upon their Repentance, pardon the Sins of Men, and remit the Punishment due to them?

In an Affair which so nearly concerns us, as the Happiness or Misery of our Souls to all Eternity,

nity, it is not possible, or indeed probable Conjectures, but certain and unquestionable Grounds, that can give the Mind any true or solid Satisfaction ; and therefore one would wonder that the Deists, who reject the Truth of the Christian Revelation, and cannot but wish in their Hearts that in this respect it were true, should yet at the same time persist in their Infidelity against so many strong and incontestable Proofs of it.

But then we are to consider that the Merits of Christ are not absolutely made over to us, but upon certain Conditions. God who appointed the Atonement that was to be made for the Sins of Mankind, had Power to prescribe what Terms and Limitations he thought fit, to the Benefits of it ; what *these* are, namely, Faith in Jesus Christ, and Repentance from dead Works, we are very plainly and frequently told in the Gospel ; but the Texts of Scripture to this purpose are so full of Consolation, that it cannot be amiss for me to repeat some of them.

*God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son (says the Apostle John iii. 16.) that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting Life. Again, He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And in another Place, This is Life eternal to know, or believe in thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent, John xvii. 3.*

With respect to the other Condition of the Sinner's Pardon, our Saviour expressly tells us, *Mat. ix. 13. That he came to call Sinners to Repentance ; and else-where, if they did not hearken to his Calls to this end, if they did not repent, They should all likewise perish ; and therefore he invites penitent Sinners to apply themselves to him in so tender and moving, and compassionate a Manner,*

Manner, and with his Arms, as it were, extended to embrace them. *Come unto me all ye that travel and are heavy laden, with the Weight and Burthen of your Sins, and I will refresh you, Mat. xi. 28.*

Thus you see the Means which Christ has prescribed; and which, by the Grace of God, are still left for the Recovery of the greatest Sinners; but then lest you should err in applying them, I proceed in the

Fourth and last Place to conclude all, with a Word or Two by way of Direction to your Consciences, in the Application of them. And First, That Faith which, according to the Terms of the Gospel, justifies a Sinner, and is reckon'd unto him for Righteousness, imports a firm Belief that Jesus Christ was the promised *Messiah*, the Saviour of the World, particularly that his Sufferings and Death upon the Cross, were a true and proper expiatory Sacrifice for the Sins of the whole World, which he offered to God *through the Spirit*, and that God accepted it as such; for tho' justifying Faith respects Christ in all his Offices of Prophet, Priest, and King; yet, as the Expiation of Sin was so absolutely necessary, and pre-requir'd by God, to the Pardon of it; our Redemption is in a more particular manner attributed to the Efficacy of Christ's Death, and he is said, *Rom. iii. 25.* to be our Propitiation, *through Faith in his Blood*; and *Chap. v. 8, 9.* God commendeth his Love towards us, in that while we were yet Sinners, Christ died for us; much more then, being now justify'd by his Blood, we shall be sav'd from Wrath through him. And therefore to quicken and confirm our Faith in the Merits of his Death,

1. Let us often reflect on the Dignity and Divinity of his Person, on the inestimable Value which his Atonement receiv'd from them, and the



the certain Acceptance and Efficacy of it with his Father, *Whereof he gave Assurance unto all Men in that he raised him from the Dead.*

2. Let us apply the Benefits of that general Expiation Christ made for the Sins of Mankind, to our particular Persons. The Scriptures are very expresse, That Christ dy'd for all Men, even for those who are represented in Danger of finally perishing; this is sufficient to convince us that the Benefits of Christ's Death were intended even for those that reject them; that God willeth that all Men, to whom Terms of Salvation were propounded, should be sav'd; and that no Christian is excluded the Means of Salvation, who, by his wilful Neglect, or Abuse of them, does not exclude himself.

3. In Consequence of our Faith in him, let us pray to the Saviour of Sinners, that he would free and deliver us from the Burthen of our Sins. *If any Man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and he is the Propitiation for our Sins.* The Applications he makes to his Father in our Behalf, are not in the Nature of those Intercessions which our Friends make for us here upon Earth, the Success whereof wholly depends on the good Will and Pleasure of the Party interceded to; but they are founded in that Power and Authority which God gave him to pardon Sinners, and receive them to Grace *in the Day of his Victories*, in the Day of his Inauguration, when *all Power in Heaven and Earth was committed to him*; and when he was made High-Priest of the true and spiritual Goods. *He hath, saith the Apostle, Heb. vii. 24. an unchangeable Priesthood; wherefore he also is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make Intercession for them.* And he never prays or interceeds in vain; he knows our  
Necessities

# S E R M O N XV. 381

Necessities before we ask, and our Ignorance in asking, and all his Desires for the Supply of them, are always heard. Can we doubt of this now that he is set down at the right Hand of God, and is enter'd by his own Blood into the Holy of Holies, there to bless us, and apply the Benefits of his Atonement to us, when even before it was *finished* upon the Cross, he lift up his Eyes and said, *Father — I know that thou hearest me always*, Joh. xi. 42. Now I say, that *he* is in the Throne of his Glory, and possess'd of that Authority, which he obtain'd by Right, and in Consequence of his Death, 'twould argue a great Want of Faith, to question whether he is able or willing to save those *who come unto God by him*.

This is a Consideration which cannot fail of making your Faith still more lively and operative, such a Faith as worketh by Love, and is fruitful of good Works; but this leads me to consider (in as few Words as I can) how you ought to qualify your selves with respect to the other Condition of your Pardon and Salvation, *viz.* Repentance from dead Works.

The first Qualification I shall to this end recommend to you, is a godly *Sorrow* and *Contrition* of Heart; not that Sorrow and Anguish of Mind which wicked Men are full of, when they have brought themselves under the Law, or other unhappy Circumstances; for 'tis plain that their Repentance, if it go no further, does not proceed from any Consideration of their having dishonour'd or provok'd the Justice of God; but from the Danger they are in here or hereafter, or both, of feeling the Effects of. I question whether the Devils themselves, who *believe and tremble*, are not Penitents in this Sense. But true *Repentance*, the Effect of that Faith which worketh by Love, proceeds from a Consideration of  
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the inviolable Regard we owe to the Commands of God; the greatest, the noblest, and supream Object of our Love, and who alone can satisfy the Desires of it.

And yet I do not condemn such a Fear in a Sinner, as proceeds from his Apprehensions of suffering; Fear is a good Disposition to begin our Repentance in, and perhaps the Repentance of most Men begins upon it; *The Fear of the Lord, says the Wisest of Men, is the beginning of Wisdom; a good Understanding have all they that do thereafter.* A Sense of the Danger of our Sins, may by degrees beget in us just a Hatred and Abhorrence of them, and so, by the Grace of God, make way for the more generous Passion and Principle of Love; but till such a Holy Change and Temper of Mind is wrought in us, our Repentance is lame and imperfect, and unacceptable to God.

2. A firm and steady Resolution, if God should spare you with Life, to persevere in the Practice of Piety. When Men are awakened by any extraordinary Providence or Danger, 'tis common enough for them to fly into sudden Heats and Transports of Zeal, and to resolve out of hand upon a new Course of Life. But when their Passions cool, or the Danger is over, they return to their former evil Ways. We have a great many sad Examples of this in Persons that recover from those Dangers, either of Sickness, or any other Accident, which brought them under the Apprehensions of Death; but we need not look abroad for Instances of this kind. 'Tis to be fear'd there are few of us but have been defective in performing the solemn Vows and Resolutions we have made to God on some moving and special Occasions, and from whence we may *all of us* learn how deceitful the Heart of Man is, and how apt to impose upon him. And therefore  
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while God gives you yet space for Repentance, make all the Tryal you can of the Sincerity of it; often put the Question to your own Hearts, Whether, supposing God in Mercy should still prolong your Days, you would effectually make good your pious Purposes of Reformation and Amendment; lay restraint upon your Appetites, and deny your selves Things even lawful and innocent. Hereby you will be the better enabled to judge of the Power you have already gain'd over your Inclinations, and of the Strength and Sincerity of your Resolutions.

3. A Third Condition of Repentance is Confession; First to God, and that not only of your Sins in general, but in as particular a manner as you can call them to Remembrance, that so you may, in some Measure, proportion your Sorrow and Humiliation to the Nature and Degree of your Guilt.

2. To Men; especially to him who has in a more peculiar manner, the Guide and Direction of your Consciences. Were not this a Duty incumbent on you, 'tis what you cannot but think your selves oblig'd to in point of common Prudence. In Cases of Difficulty, that nearly concern our Interests in this Life, we are very cautious how we rely on our own Judgment; but when our great and supream Interest is at stake, when the Happiness of the Soul to all Eternity is the Thing in question; certainly we cannot be too particular in laying open our Case to those who are best capable of advising us, and shewing us what Flaws or Defects there may be in it; but besides, there is another very weighty and important Reason, why Penitents should make particular Confession of their Sins to their Spiritual Guides, and which I cannot give you better than in the Words of our admirable Liturgy, *viz. That by the Ministry*  
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of God's holy Word they may receive the Benefit of Absolution, together with ghostly Counsel and Advice, to the quieting of their Consciences, and avoiding all Scruples and Doubtfulness. If you believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God; and with these Qualifications of your Faith and Repentance, which I have mention'd, you be in perfect Charity with all Men, and ready to make Restitution to the utmost of your Power to all those you have any ways wrong'd or injur'd; particularly, if in the Motion which your Faith and Repentance excite in you, you approach the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that visible Pledge of God's pardoning and sanctifying Grace to Sinners: Be of good Comfort, whatever your spiritual Wounds are, Christ will make you whole; *tho' your Sins be as Scarlet they shall be made white as Snow; tho' they be as red as Crimson, they shall be as Wool,* Isa. i. 18. The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all Sin, that is, from every kind and degree of it; the greatest, the most habitual Sinners, if they have true Faith and Repentance, shall not only be pardon'd, but receiv'd to Grace, and enter into the Joy of the Lord. Let not therefore the Thoughts of appearing before an Earthly Judge, and of suffering the just Reward of your Sins here, distract, or too much discompose your Thoughts, Death is terrible, but the preparative Duties to it, which I have been recommending, will disarm it of its greatest Terrors, and give you that Confidence in the Mercies of the great Judge and Saviour of the World, which you will find the unspeakable Consolations of, when you stand in most need of them, by the Grace of God, at the Hour of Death, but most certainly in the Day of Judgment.

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